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How have you checked cow vigilantism: SC asks States

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Markets continue to slump for third day

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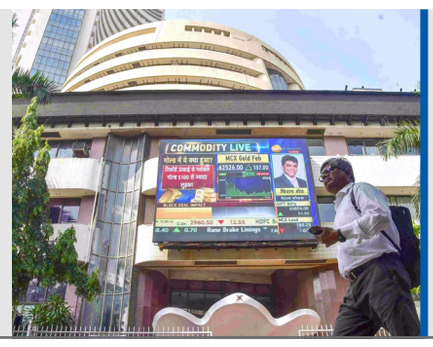

SPORTS

Candidates Chess: Gukesh draws with Nepomniachtchi

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BSF KILLS 29 NAXALS IN CH'GARH

This is the biggest encounter; over 79 Naxals have been killed since January

KANKER, 16 APRIL

Ahead of the first phase of polling in Chhattisgarh, security personnel gunned down 29 Naxalites, including some senior cadres, in Kanker district on Tuesday in the biggest encounter ever in the state, police said.

This was the highest fatalities suffered by Naxalites in a single encounter in the history of the state's fight against Left Wing Extremism. Since the start of 2024, as many as 79 Naxalites have been killed in separate gun-battles with security forces in the Bastar region, a Maoist stronghold.

Three security personnel also suffered injuries in the fierce gun-battle and a large quantity of weapons was recovered from the spot, officials said.

Deputy Chief Minister Vijay Sharma, who holds the home portfolio, hailed the encounter as a "surgical strike" and a major success, and asserted credit for it goes to brave security personnel.

The latest gunfight took place at around 2 pm in Hapatola forest between Binagunda and Koronar villages under Chhotebethiya police station limits, when a joint team of the Border Security Force (BSF) and the state police's District Reserve Guard (DRG) was out on an anti-Naxal operation, Inspector General of Police (Bastar Range) Sundarraj P said.

Security personnel during an encounter with Naxalites, in Kanker district, on Tuesday **PHOTO: PTI**

- Polling in the Naxalite-hit Bastar Lok Sabha seat will take place on 19 April in the first phase, while the Kanker, part of the Bastar region.

The operation was launched based on inputs about the presence of senior cadres of north Bastar division of the outlawed CPI (Maoist) Shankar, Lalita, Raju and others, he said.

"Huge cache of weapons, including AK-47, SLR, Insas and .303 rifles, were recovered from the spot," the IG said.

Polling in the Naxalite-hit Bastar Lok Sabha seat will take place on 19 April in the first phase, while the Kanker, part of the Bastar region, will vote in the second round of general elections on 26 April.

The slain Naxalites were yet to be identified, but prima facie it seems senior cadres of the north Bastar division of the CPI (Maoist) are among them, Sundarraj added.

Sources in the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) said three security personnel -- two BSF inspectors and one DRG trooper -- were injured in the gunfight.

Shankar and Lalita, both divisional committee members of the north Bastar division of Maoists, are believed to be amongst the deceased, the sources added.

After the latest encounter, 79 Naxalites have been killed in separate gun-battles with security forces in the Bastar region, comprising seven districts, including Kanker, so far this year.

On 2 April, as many as 13 Naxalites were killed, while six Maoists were gunned down on March 27 in encounters with security forces in Bijapur district. —*PTI*

IMF RAISES INDIA'S GDP FORECAST TO 6.8% FOR FY25

WASHINGTON, 16 APRIL

The International Monetary Fund on Tuesday raised India's growth projection to 6.8 per cent from its January forecast of 6.5 per cent citing bullish domestic demand conditions and a rising working-age population.

With this, India continues to be the fastest growing economy of the world, ahead of China's growth projection of 4.6 per cent during the same period. At the same time, growth in emerging and developing Asia is expected to fall from an estimated 5.6 per cent in 2023 to 5.2 per cent in 2024 and 4.9 per cent in 2025, a slight upward revision compared with the January 2024 WEO Update.

IMF in its January update had projected 6.5 per cent growth for India in 2024.

Global growth, estimated at 3.2 per cent in 2023, is projected to continue at the same pace in 2024 and 2025.

—*PTI*

PHOTO: x/@ANI

Boat capsizes in Jhelum river in J&K, 6 dead

SRINAGAR, 16 APRIL

A boat carrying mostly school children capsized in the Jhelum River on the outskirts of the city on Tuesday, leaving six people dead and many others missing. Three people were rescued after the incident in Gandbal Nowgam area. Incessant rains over the last couple of days have led to an increase in the water levels of several water bodies, including Jhelum. Senior officials from police and civil administration, including Divisional Commissioner Kashmir, Inspector General of Police, Kashmir and Deputy Commissioner Srinagar were at the spot monitoring rescue operations. —*PTI*

Lightning, rains kill 49 in Pakistan

ISLAMABAD, 16 APRIL

Lightning and heavy rains have killed at least 49 people across Pakistan in the past three days, officials said Monday, as authorities in the country's southwest declared a state of emergency. Some deaths occurred when lightning struck farmers harvesting wheat. Rains caused dozens of houses to collapse in the northwest and in eastern Punjab province. At least 21 people had died in Punjab. The disaster management authority in northwestern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province said 21 people died there. Seven people killed in Baluchistan. —*PTI*

>>>More on Page 6

EC bans Surjewala from campaigning for 48hrs

NEW DELHI, 16 APRIL

Election Commission on Tuesday reprimanded Congress leader Randeep Surjewala over his alleged derogatory remarks against BJP MP Hema Malini and barred him from campaigning for 48 hours. This is the first campaign ban imposed by the poll body in this Lok Sabha election cycle. EC had last Tuesday issued a show-cause notice to Surjewala for his alleged "undignified, uncivilised and vulgar" remarks against Malini. In his reply to the show-cause notice, Congress general secretary had maintained that the video cited by BJP was "doctored". —*PTI*

>>>More on Page 3

Israel vows to retaliate against Iran as world leaders urge restrain

JERUSALEM, 16 APRIL

Israel's military chief said Monday that his country will respond to Iran's weekend attack, but he did not elaborate on when and how as world leaders urged against retaliation, trying to avoid a spiral of violence in the Middle East.

They also said that the Israeli air force which has a squadron of US-made F-16, F-15 and F-35 fighter jets is gearing up for a counter-strike against Iran but did not provide a timeline. Iran launched hundreds of drones, ballistic missiles and cruise missiles at Israel in the attack.

The US has urged Israel to show restraint as it seeks to build a broad diplomatic response. British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak said "all sides must show restraint" to avoid a rising spiral of violence in the Middle East. French President Emmanuel Macron said Paris will try to "convince Israel that we must not respond by escalating."

—*AP*

>>>More on Page 6

Israel intercepted hundreds of missiles and drones fired by Iran during its first-ever attack on it **PHOTO: PTI**

'POLLS HUMONGOUS TASK'

Do not bring down system: SC pans EVM critics

NEW DELHI, 16 APRIL

Supreme Court on Tuesday deprecated criticism of Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) and calls for reverting to ballot papers, saying the electoral process in India is a "humongous task" and attempts should not be made to "bring down the system".

It also recalled how polling booths were captured in the era of ballot papers to manipulate election results.

The top court was hearing a batch of pleas seeking complete cross-verification of the votes cast using EVMs with Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT), an independent vote verification system which enables an elector to see whether his vote was cast correctly.

A bench of Justices Sanjiv Khanna and Dipankar Datta was critical of the argument that many European countries have gone back to ballot papers after having tried out voting machines.

Bhushan said he also wants that every voter should be allowed to collect the paper slip of his vote cast from the VVPAT machine and drop it into the ballot box.

He also sought reversal of the poll panel's decision to replace the transparent glass on VVPAT machines with an opaque glass through which a voter can see the slip only when the light is on for seven seconds.

The bench asked Singh whether it is possible to subject EVMs to technical evaluation to rule out any foul play after the counting of votes is over.

Singh urged the court to not indicate any such thing without hearing the poll panel on the issue as it would create unnecessary confusion.

The bench also asked the poll panel to appraise it about the punishment prescribed under the law for someone who manipulates EVMs.

The hearing remained inconclusive and would resume on 18 April. The seven-phase Lok Sabha polls will begin on 19 April. —*PTI*

- A bench of Justices Sanjiv Khanna and Dipankar Datta was critical of the argument that many European countries have gone back to ballot papers.

PHOTO: PTI

During the procession, chief priest Gnanendra leads the way carrying Karaga **PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD**

300-YEAR-OLD KARAGA FESTIVAL BEGINS IN B'LURU

BENGALURU, 16 APRIL

Bengaluru's historic 300-year-old Karaga festival started on Tuesday with flag hoisting and prayers were offered at the Dharmaraya Swamy Temple. The festival, spanning nine days, will culminate on 23 April. On the night of full moon the Draupadi Devi flower Karaga event, will take place.

This festival is also renowned for its significance as a symbol of Hindu-Muslim unity, the Karaga procession pauses at the Hazrat Tawakkal Mastan Dargah, a Sufi shrine situated at Cottonpet.

In preparation for the festivities, the Karaga organisers, with assistance from Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP), have undertaken efforts to clean the Sankey Tank lake. The lake, which had dried up during the summer, will serve as a venue for carrying out further rituals associated with the festival.

The rituals conducted over the nine days at the Dharmaraya Swamy Temple have a rich history dating back around 800 years. The temple was constructed by the Vanniyakula Kshatriyas, believed to be the descendants of Veerakumars, an army founded by Draupadi in her battle against the demon Timirasura.

During the procession, the chief priest, adorned in feminine attire, leads the way carrying the "Karaga" – a large mud pot adorned with a tall floral pyramid and an idol of the Goddess. The priest must balance the Karaga on his head throughout the procession without touching it and carry out the procession for eight hours in the night.

—*Salar News*

BJP MP Karadi Sanganna quits, likely to join Cong

BENGALURU, 16 APRIL

BJP MP from Koppal Karadi Sanganna Amarappa resigned with days ahead of Lok Sabha elections in Karnataka.

Sanganna was discontent over BJP not renominating him for this year's General Elections. Sanganna, who secured victory from Koppal on a BJP ticket in 2019, was dissatisfied with the party fielding Basavaraj Kyavatur for the upcoming elections. Despite initially pledging his support for Kyavatur's campaign and assuring his cooperation with the party's directives, Sanganna's discontent grew as he was sidelined in the nomination process.

Following his resignation, Sanganna wasted no time in engaging with prominent leaders from the Congress party, fueling speculation about his imminent defection. He disclosed his intention to join Congress after meeting Chief Minister Siddaramaiah in the State capital. Karnataka will vote in two phases on 26 April and 7 May. Wednesday is also an important day for Congress as Rahul Gandhi will be visiting Mandya and Kolar to campaign for the Congress candidates. —*Salar News*

PHOTO: NATION PORTAL OF INDIA

MANIPUR: 1 HURT AS ARMED MEN TARGET FUEL TANKERS

IMPHAL, 16 APRIL

A driver was shot at as armed men allegedly targeted fuel tankers in Manipur's Tamenglong district on Tuesday, police said.

At least two fuel tankers were hit in the firing that happened near Keimei village on NH-37 which connects Imphal with Silchar.

Armed men, who are yet to be identified, fired from hilltops targeting the fuel tankers on the highway, in which the driver was shot in his leg, they added.

Following the incident, long queues were seen outside petrol pumps in Imphal valley as panic-buying gripped the people.

—*PTI*

KIA records highest flyer traffic in 2023-24

BENGALURU, 16 APRIL

Kempegowda International Airport has witnessed the highest-ever annual passenger traffic and cargo numbers, with a total of 37.53 million passengers traversing through its terminals and 4,39,524 metric tonne of cargo passing through the airport during the financial year 2023-24.

The airport catered to 32.86 million domestic and 4.67 million international passengers during this period, it said.

With the successful launch of Terminal 2 and partnerships with leading airlines and cargo operators, we are poised to solidify our position as the premier gateway to South and Central India, he said. In a statement, it said in the financial year 2024, with the surge in travel demand, the Bangalore airport emerged as the pre-eminent gateway in South India, connecting travellers to a total of 108 destinations, comprising 80 domestic and 28 international routes, thus significantly enhancing options for passengers.

The airport also experienced a remarkable increase in air traffic movements (ATMs), with a total of 2,45,880 ATMs recorded during financial year 2024. Domestic ATMs saw 10 per cent growth while international growth stood at 13 per cent as compared to the previous financial year.

The Airport Cargo recorded a total throughput of 439,524 metric tonne in financial year 2024, reflecting a notable 7.1 per cent increase from the preceding financial year. —*PTI*

SANDALWOOD DOYEN

Kannada actor Dwarakish dies at 81

BENGALURU, 16 APRIL

Veteran Kannada actor, producer and director Bungle Shama Rao Dwarakanath, popularly known as Dwarakish who is best known for his roles as a comedian in a film career spanning more than five decades, died following a cardiac arrest at his residence here on Tuesday.

A doyen of Kannada film industry, the 81-year-old had acted in over 90 movies and produced and directed around 50 movies.

Tributes poured in for the versatile actor who was so "synonymous" with comedy that the audience would start giggling the moment he appeared on the big screen.

"Sharing the screen with great actors like Rajkumar and Vishnuvardhan, he made his own mark in the minds of the audience through his humorous acting. Kannada cinema has become poorer with the death of Dwarakish," Chief Minister Siddaramaiah said.

Born on 19 August, 1942 at Hunsur in Mysuru district, the legendary actor was a household name in the State during the prime of his career.

He tasted big success as a producer with his movie "Mayor Muthanna" starring Kannada matinee idol Dr Rajkumar and Bharathi in the lead roles in 1969. Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar said Dwarakish brought life to roles as a comedian, hero and supporting actor. Former Chief Minister HD Kumaraswamy said: "Not only as an artist, his unparalleled service to the Kannada film industry as a producer and director is unforgettable. He was an asset to Kannada cinema due to his versatile talent, who acted with great actors like Rajkumar, Vishnuvardhan and Ambareesh." —*PTI*

Dwarakish **PHOTO: X/@HOMBALEFILMS**

BBMP bans meat sale, slaughter for Ram Navami

BENGALURU, 16 APRIL

Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) has announced a ban on meat sales and animal slaughter in Bengaluru on 17 April, in observance of Rama Navami. In a press release issued by Animal Husbandry Department, it states that the prohibition covers both the sale of meat and the slaughter of animals within City limits. According to Joint Director of Animal Husbandry, this is a blanket ban enforced by BBMP. *—Salar News*

3 killed in road accident near Hubballi

HUBBALLI, 16 APRIL

Three people from Andhra Pradesh were killed and another were seriously injured after the car they were travelling in collided head-on with a bus on the outskirts of the city, police said on Tuesday. The four were on their way to their home state when the mishap happened near Anchatgeri village late on Monday night, they said. While three of them succumbed to their injuries, the fourth one is being treated in the ICU at a hospital. The impact of the accident was such that the car got completely crushed. *—PTI*

All accused in Belagavi stripping case arrested

BENGALURU, 16 APRIL

State government informed High Court that all 12 accused who stripped and assaulted a woman in Belagavi have been arrested and a chargesheet has been filed in the trial court. The State also said the victim has been provided with 2 acres of land and Rs 5 lakh in compensation. During the hearing of a suo motu public interest litigation initiated by High Court, Advocate General K Sasikiran Shetty, representing the State, informed the court that the investigation is completed, and legal action has been taken against the accused. The court has agreed to monitor her health and allowed her to undergo expert consultation every two months for a year to address mental health concerns. However, the court stated that it cannot directly monitor these aspects and instructed the government to submit a report of the case to the district superintendent of police.

—PTI

CCB seizes drugs, cigarettes worth Rs 10 lakh

BENGALURU, 16 APRIL

Central Crime Branch (CCB) Anti-Narcotics Squad along with Bengaluru City police have busted illegal drugs, electronic cigarettes and hookah equipment to combat drug trafficking and illegal sale of restricted goods. Acting on a tip from an informant, on 13 April, CCB raided a sports club in Begur where a foreign national, identified as Aisharami, was allegedly selling marijuana. Aisharami, an illegal resident for eight years in the City was held with 5.5kg of ganja worth Rs 10 lakh. On the same day, another raid was conducted in Bagalagunte storing illegal items. The raid yielded a significant haul: 291 e-cigarettes from various brands, 240 packs of foreign cigarettes, 360 hookah bowls, and 100 hookah pots, all valued at Rs 22.35 lakh. One worker residing at the house was arrested, while two owners and another worker remain at large. In a similar raid, on 15 April, a foreign national residing illegally in Bengaluru was held after his student passport had expired. He was detained and transferred to the Foreigners Restriction Centre (FRC) at Sondekoppa. *—Salar News*

Tumakuru witnesses intense face-off between BJP, Cong

It's BJP's V Somanna against Cong's SP Muddahanumegowda

TUMAKURU, 16 APRIL

As the election fervour intensifies in Karnataka, Tumakuru Lok Sabha constituency in close proximity to Bengaluru is witnessing a showdown between BJP and Congress.

The contest has the BJP's seasoned politician and former minister V Somanna, against Congress' nominee, former judge SP Muddahanumegowda, who was a one-time MP.

A point of contention in this electoral clash revolves around the issue of local representation versus outsider influence. While Somanna hails from Bengaluru, Gowda prides himself on being a local candidate.

"I'm local here and I'm easily available for my Tumakuru people, unlike my opponent," asserted Gowda in an interview with ANI, highlighting the advantage of his grassroots presence in the constituency.

In response, Somanna, didn't hesitate to fire back, taking a jab at the leadership of the Congress. "Who is the leader of Congress? Rahul Gandhi and Sonia Gandhi. Where are they from?" he retorted, insinuating that Congress' leadership itself is disconnected from the grassroots.

While V Somanna is a Lingayat, Congress' SP Muddahanumegowda is a Vokkaliga **PHOTO: PTI**

The rhetoric reflects not only the intense competition for the Tumakuru seat but also the broader ideological clash between the two political giants, each vying for supremacy in Karnataka's political landscape.

As the election date draws nearer, the stakes continue to rise, with both parties sparing no effort to sway the electorate in their favour. The battle lines are drawn, and Tumakuru finds itself at the centre of a political storm, awaiting the verdict of its constituents come polling day.

As the political battleground heats up in Tumakuru Lok Sabha constituency, a closer examination of its demographic composition sheds light on the intricate tapestry of voter preferences and community affiliations.

With a total of over 16 lakh eligible voters, the constituency boasts a diverse array of communities, each wielding its own influence in the electoral arena.

According to recent data, the Vokkaliga community constitutes the largest bloc of voters, comprising 15 per cent of the electorate. Following closely behind are the Lingayats, who represent 14.4 per cent of voters, followed by the Muslim community at 9.5 per cent.

Scheduled Caste (SC) voters are split into two significant segments, with SC Left comprising 9.4 per cent of the electorate and SC right making up 4.1 per cent.

Other notable communities include the Scheduled Tribes (ST) at 7 per cent, Kurubas at 6 per cent, Gollas at 5.8 per cent, and Thiglas at 5.1 per cent.

This intricate mosaic of voter demographics underscores the significance of community-based politics in Tumakuru, where candidates must navigate a complex web of affiliations and allegiances to secure electoral success.

As political parties strategise and campaign intensifies, understanding the nuances of these demographic dynamics will be crucial in shaping the electoral outcome and determining the future trajectory of Tumakuru's political landscape.

Tumakuru constituency is slated for voting in the second phase on 26 April. *—ANI*

AFTER WOMAN'S PROTEST

JD(S) seeks EC action over security lapse at HDD event

TUMAKURU, 16 APRIL

JD(S) on Tuesday approached Election Commission over the alleged security lapse at an event presided by former Prime Minister and party patriarch HD Deve Gowda here and sought the suspension of police officials responsible for it.

In a letter to the Returning Officer of Tumakuru, the party said, on 15 April at Kunchitiga Samudaya Bhavana here, a leaders' meeting was conducted with due permission from the poll panel by BJP and JD(S) under the leadership of Deve Gowda in support of V Somanna (BJP).

Somanna is contesting from the Tumakuru in the Lok Sabha polls.

"Police officials who were present at the meeting venue did not take any security measures and let women supporting Congress inside the hall. The women managed to reach the stage where Deve Gowda was present without being questioned or checked as police failed to do their job," the party alleged.

HD Deve Gowda **PHOTO: PTI**

- JD(S) on Tuesday approached Election Commission over the alleged security lapse at an event presided by former Prime Minister and party patriarch HD Deve Gowda here and sought the suspension of police officials responsible for it.

JD(S) alleged that Deputy Chief Minister and state Congress Chief D K Shivakumar and Minister Rajanna were behind the incident. It urged the EC to take action against the "police officials" responsible for the security lapse and demanded their suspension. *—PTI*

No more with BJP to face action, says rebel leader KS Eshwarappa

BENGALURU, 16 APR

A day after BJP President BY Vijayendra warned about party cracking the whip against him, KS Eshwarappa, who is contesting as an independent, on Tuesday said he is independent and no more with the party to face such disciplinary action.

Eshwarappa, a former deputy chief minister who had also served as the party's state unit president, has entered the fray blaming Vijayendra and his father and veteran party leader BS Yediyurappa for his son KE Kantesh being denied the ticket to contest from Haveri.

Vijayendra's brother and MP B Y Raghavendra is BJP candidate from Shivamogga.

Speaking to reporters here, the 75-year-old said he was an independent and is not with BJP.

KS Eshwarappa **PHOTO: ANI**

"Take whatever disciplinary action you want. I don't fear such threats. My intention is similar to that of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Modi says he is fighting against family politics of Congress' Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi at the Centre, while my efforts are towards bringing out the party from the clutches of father and sons (Yediyurappa and sons), he said.

Noting that Vijayendra is the state President, his brother is an MP and their father is the member of the central election committee, Eshwarappa sarcastically said, "if anyone is left out in the family, give them also the positions, the party is to serve your family."

Lakhs of workers have shed their blood and sweat to build the party, he said. "What is your (Vijayendra) contribution? Speak carefully....go and see how much anger people have against you even in Shikaripura, people are saying you won the assembly elections there with money, in this election there is no money factor, people are with me. I will do 'shikari' (huntdown) of the father and sons in Shikaripura, I won't let them this time." *—PTI*

BIG BREAKTHROUGH

ISRO makes lightweight rocket engine nozzles

BENGALURU, 16 APRIL

ISRO said it has achieved a breakthrough in rocket engine technology with the development of a lightweight Carbon-Carbon (C-C) nozzle for rocket engines, enhancing payload capacity.

This innovation accomplished by the space agency's Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre (VSSC) promises to enhance the vital parameters of rocket engines, including thrust levels, specific impulse, and thrust-to-weight ratios, thereby boosting the payload capacity of launch vehicles, it said.

Thiruvananthapuram-based VSSC leveraged advanced materials like C-C composites to create a nozzle divergent that offers exceptional properties, ISRO said.

By utilising processes such as carbonisation of green composites, chemical vapour Infiltration, and high-temperature treatment, it has produced a nozzle with low density, high specific strength, and excellent stiffness, capable of retaining mechanical properties even at elevated temperatures, it said.

Lightweight Carbon-Carbon (C-C) nozzle for rocket engines **PHOTO: PTI**

A key feature of the C-C nozzle is its special anti-oxidation coating of silicon carbide, which extends its operational limits in oxidising environments. This innovation not only reduces thermally induced stresses but also enhances corrosion resistance, allowing for extended operational temperature limits in hostile environments, according to ISRO.

The potential impact of this development is significant, particularly for the ISRO's workhorse launcher, the Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV).

The PS4, the fourth stage of the PSLV, currently employs twin engines with nozzles made from columbium alloy. However, by replacing these metallic divergent nozzles with C-C counterparts.

This substitution is projected to increase the payload capability of the PSLV by 15 kg, a notable enhancement for space missions. *—PTI*

KR PURAM RAMP TO BE CLOSED FROM 17 APRIL

BENGALURU, 16 APRIL

Bengaluru traffic police have announced traffic changes in North Bengaluru at KR Puram up-ramp of Hebbal flyover from 17 April.

Bengaluru Development Authority (BDA) has begun its construction to expand Hebbal flyover by adding two new lanes.

Addressing a press conference on Tuesday, MN Anucheth, Joint Commissioner of Police (Traffic) termed this as the last resort to ease the traffic chaos. All vehicles except for two-wheelers will be barred. This restriction will remain in place until further notice. This project will necessitate the dismantling of a portion of existing KR Puram ramp where it merges with the main flyover.

- This project will necessitate the dismantling of a portion of existing KR Puram ramp where it merges with the main flyover

Motorists travelling from Nagawara on Outer Ring Road (ORR) towards the City are advised to take a detour below the flyover at Hebbal circle.

For those travelling from KR Puram towards the City, alternative routes are recommended. These include IOC-Mukunda Theatre Road, Lingarajapuram Flyover. The authorities urge the public to cooperate with these traffic diversions to minimize congestion during the construction phase. *—Salar News*

RIVER IN MADIKERI RUNS DRY DUE TO DEFICIT RAIN

MADIKERI, 16 APRIL

Kodagu District, renowned for its scenic hills, dense forests, and pristine rivers, is currently grappling with an acute water crisis due to severe drought conditions and intense heat. Due to the lack of rain another crucial waterway, the Lakshmana Tirtha River, has now completely dried up.

Due to the dire situation the farmers in South Kodagu, especially those dependent on the river for their coffee plantations, struggling to irrigate their crops. Moreover, the scarcity of drinking water has become a pressing concern for both residents and their livestock. *—Salar News*

Rahul to address rally in Mandya in first Karnataka campaign

BENGALURU, 16 APRIL

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi will be in State on Wednesday to campaign for the Lok Sabha elections, during which he will address public meetings in Mandya and Kolar.

It is his first visit to the state after the poll schedule was announced a month ago.

Interestingly, the Congress is facing JD(S), which is BJP's ally, in both seats.

While it will be a direct contest between JD(S) leader HD Kumaraswamy and Congress' Venkataramane Gowda, popularly known as 'Star Chandru' in Mandya, the fight is between Congress' KV Gowtham and JD(S)' M Mallesh Babu in Kolar. The Congress had secured only one seat in the 2019 general elections in State, which has a total of 28 constituencies. BJP had bagged 25 while an independent candidate backed by the party had also emerged victorious. JD(S) which fought the elections in alliance with Congress then, won one seat. Both Mandya and Kolar are going to polls in the first of the two-phase elections in Karnataka. *—PTI*

Rahul Gandhi **PHOTO: PTI**

PM MUST BOW TO SC ELECTORAL BONDS VERDICT: DKS

MYSURU, 13 APRIL

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar on Tuesday said that the verdict of Supreme Court on the matter of electoral bonds should be respected as "it is the highest body and has to be respected".

The remarks came after Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in an interview with ANI, accused the Opposition of "spreading lies" over the electoral bonds scheme and said "everyone will regret it when there is an honest reflection".

The Supreme Court in February this year struck down the electoral bond scheme and said it was unconstitutional. *—ANI*

'MUSLIMS UNHAPPY WITH MODI'

NDA won on false narratives, but not this time: Khan

NAHEED ATAULLA
BENGALURU, 16 APRIL

Veteran Congress leader and former deputy chairman of the Rajya Sabha K Rahman Khan claimed that there is no Modi wave in this Lok Sabha polls and that Congress will repeat its performance of the 2023 Assembly polls in Karnataka. In an interview with **Salar News**, Khan expressed optimism that Congress will break the stranglehold of BJP over the three prestigious constituencies in Bengaluru.

In recent years Karnataka voters have delivered mandates differently for Parliament and Assembly elections. They have preferred Congress for the State Assembly and BJP at the Centre. What is your reading for these polls?

No doubt, that has been the trend. The circumstances that were prevalent in the last two general elections were based on false narratives of corruption on the 2G spectrum (CAG report had claimed 2G or second generation mobile network licences were given away at throwaway prices instead of conducting free and fair auctions) and coal allocation scam. In 2014, the NDA won the polls on this narrative, which was proved wrong later. The 2G scam was falsely created by a set of bureaucrats and political parties who manipulated the figures. In 2019, it was Prime Minister Narendra Modi's wave as he was presumed to be the only person who can lead the country. It was based on propaganda that he would uphold Hindutva ideology and build the Ram temple. This time circumstances are quite different. However, elections are not being conducted fairly by Election Commission. Congress funds have been frozen and the election process has been extended to two months, which was unnecessary. Karnataka will see a repeat of the 2023 Assembly polls, where the Congress returned to power.

How do you perceive the mood of the minorities across the country about INDIA and the NDA alliance, considering Modi's claim that Muslim women in the Hindi heartland fully support him for the triple talaq decision?

That is Modi's view. However, Muslims in India are generally not happy with his policies such as National Register of Citizens, Uniform Civil Code or abolishing the Maulana Azad scholarships. The NDA government has not taken action against those responsible for atrocities against Muslims.

How do you explain the dearth of young Muslim leadership in Congress? Is it because Congress is not encouraging young blood to come up or the seniors are reluctant to vacate the space?

Congress is the only party that provides political representation to Muslims. However, you are right, Congress is not giving election tickets to Muslims to the extent they deserve. For instance, in Karnataka, there was an opportunity to give two tickets in Lok Sabha polls, but only one was given. The perception is that due to the Hindutva wave, it is difficult for a Muslim candidate to get elected. Therefore, this is being compensated by giving them representation in the Legislative Councils. However, this may not be adequate according to the expectations of the Muslim community.

Scan this QR code to watch the full interview on Salar Youtube channel

What are the reasons for Congress not being able to win the three prestigious seats from Bengaluru?

In 2009, for Bengaluru Central constituency, Congress lost because they had fielded HT Sangliana, a former police officer who belonged to a minority community, while JD(S) had put up BZ Zameer Ahmed Khan. Although the combined votes of both candidates were more than the BJP candidate who won, it was difficult to regain the constituency once lost. However, we are making efforts to win it back now. In the upcoming Bengaluru South election, Congress has a good chance of winning as they have fielded Sowmya Reddy, who is a Vokkaliga leader. Vokkaligas are large in number.

What is your message to the minorities about exercising their franchise?

The problem with minorities is that they do not come out to vote. If they do, the vote share of Congress will rise. The campaign should be to exhort the minorities to come to the polling booth because once they come, they will vote for Congress. The party has to work to bring the Muslim voters to the polling booths.

— Salar News

ELECTION INSIGHTS

BJP chases 3rd straight poll win with bigger margin

BJP has set itself an ambitious target of winning 370 Lok Sabha seats, a goal aimed as much at projecting its strength as at diminishing the Opposition in popular imagination. Only once in the last five decades has a party won so many seats.

HERE IS A SWOT (STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES, OPPORTUNITIES, THREATS) ANALYSIS OF THE RULING PARTY AS IT CHASES A THIRD STRAIGHT STINT IN POWER.

STRENGTHS

- BJP has a leader in Prime Minister Narendra Modi whose mass appeal has propelled the party into making an impact in Lok Sabha polls even in states where it lacked strong organisation
- BJP election manifesto promises to implement CAA, UCC, One Nation One Election will attract a lot of voters
- Since 2014, BJP has built up an organisational machinery overseen by seasoned poll campaigners at regional and state levels
- Another strength of BJP is its uncontested dominance in setting the pitch of the electoral battle

WEAKNESSES

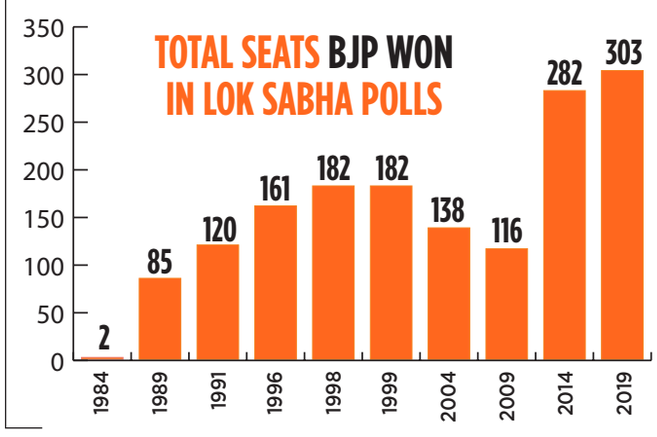
- The party doesn't have many young face and has eased out many of its experienced state satraps
- As much resonant as BJP's Hindutva, nationalism and 'labharthi' agenda is in large parts of the country, it does seem to lose traction in unfamiliar linguistic and cultural milieus as in parts of south and east India
- Lack of stronghold in Southern states
- Rather than focusing on local narratives the party rely on Modi waves

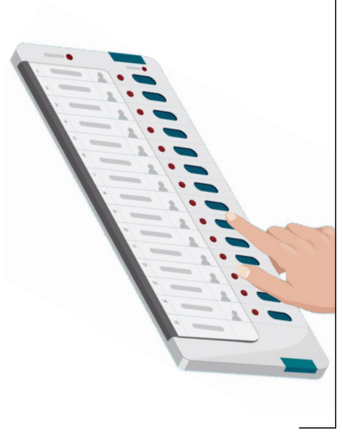
OPPORTUNITIES

- BJP starts the poll battle with more odds-on favourite this time than it was in 2019 and 2014
- The Opposition's attempt to come under a united banner under the 'INDIA' bloc has turned out to be a half-hearted exercise
- The party is the main Opposition party in a large number of states
- Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal in ED custody and accounts of Congress have been frozen ahead of the election. These means the largest Opposition parties can barely campaign

THREATS

- Supreme Court's decision to strike down the electoral bond scheme for funding to political parties has given Opposition an issue to target them over corruption
- Some big states like Karnataka and Maharashtra, have a strong presence of Opposition parties
- Regional parties like RJD in Bihar and SP in UP seeking to chip away at its Other Backward Classes and Dalit support base
- Oppositions have been trying to build a counter-narrative around bread-and-butter issues such as employment and price rise





Congress leader Rahul Gandhi speaks to people in Wayanad rally on Monday *PHOTO: PTI*

Electoral bonds a way to extort: RaGa

He says BJP is using businessmen

NEW DELHI, 16 APRIL

Kozhikode/Wayanad, 16 April Senior Congress leader Rahul Gandhi launched an attack on Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday over the electoral bond issue, describing it as a "form of extortion" and alleging "intimidatory tactics" against targeted businessmen.

"There are some people in every small town or village who extort money on the streets by threatening physical harm. In Malayalam you call this extortion 'kolla adikkal' (loot), but Modi calls it electoral bonds. What a common thief is doing on the streets, the PM is doing at an international level," Gandhi alleged.

During his campaign in Wayanad Lok Sabha seat, the Congress candidate accused the BJP-led central government of using sophisticated tactics to threaten targeted businessmen.

He also lashed out at Modi, accusing him of helping a few rich businessmen in the country.

"At the electoral bond level, the threats are much more sophisticated. The ED, CBI and Income Tax people will come, they will interrogate and at the end of it, they will say why don't you give this (their business) to (businessman) Adani," the sitting Congress MP from Wayanad LS constituency alleged.

He alleged that this is how businessman Adani got the Mumbai airport from its previous owner.

In other instances, such "intimidatory tactics" also led to the businessman paying the BJP in electoral bonds, the Congress MP alleged.

He promised to give Rs one lakh per annum to one woman from every poor family. *—PTI*

Prime Minister Narendra Modi slammed the opposition at Bihar's Gaya Rally *PHOTO: PTI*

Polls will punish those against Constitution: PM

He says Oppn against 'Viksit Bharat'

NEW DELHI, 16 APRIL

Launching a blistering attack on the opposition bloc INDIA, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday said this election is to punish those who are against India's Constitution and opposing the Centre's efforts to make the country a 'Viksit Bharat'.

He also accused the opposition leaders, including those of the RJD and the Congress, of playing politics with the Constitution.

Speaking at an election rally in Bihar's Gaya district, the Prime Minister said, "This election is only to punish 'Ghamandia' (arrogant) alliance leaders. It is to punish those who are against the Constitution and opposing the Centre's initiatives to make India a 'Viksit Bharat' (developed India)."

Bihar's former chief minister and Hindustani Awam Morcha (HAM) founder Jitan Ram Manjhi is contesting from Gaya as an NDA nominee.

Modi alleged that the opposition leaders are "against the celebration of Constitution Day".

"They (opposition leaders) are playing politics with the Constitution. For us, the Constitution is a matter of 'aastha'. People of the country have decided to give NDA 400 plus seats this time," he said.

The Prime Minister also claimed that the "Congress has lost the opportunity to make India a 'Samridh Bharat' (developed India)".

"In the last 10 years, the country witnessed a revolution and the overall development of women...Ten crore women in the country joined self-help groups and of them, 1.25 crore are in Bihar," the Modi said. *—PTI*

India took steps to modernise its military, says US intel official

WASHINGTON, 16 APRIL

"India in 2023 showcased itself as a global leader as it demonstrated a greater willingness to counter China's activity throughout the Indo-Pacific region and took steps to modernise its military and reduce its dependency on Russian origin-equipment," the top US intelligence official has told Congress.

The remarks by Lt. Gen. Jeffrey Kruse, Director of the Defence Intelligence Agency, came during a Congressional hearing on defence intelligence countering China. "During the past year, India has showcased itself as a global leader by hosting the Group of 20 economic summit and demonstrated a greater willingness to counter PRC's (People's Republic of China) activity throughout the Indo-Pacific region," Kruse told

PHOTO:X

members of the House Armed Services Committee — the subcommittee on intelligence and special operations.

India, he said, has advanced partnerships in the Indo-Pacific with regional South China Sea claimants, such as the Philippines, through training and defence sales and deepening cooperation with the U.S., Australia, France and Japan.

China claims most of the South China Sea as its own, while The Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei and Taiwan have counter-claims over the maritime area.

"In 2023, India took steps to modernise its military to compete with China and reduce its dependency on Russian-origin equipment. India conducted sea trials for its first domestically produced aircraft carrier and also has negotiated with several Western countries on the transfer of key defence technologies," Kruse said.

"In 2023, India took steps to modernise its military to compete with China and reduce its dependency on Russian-origin equipment. India conducted sea trials for its first domestically produced aircraft carrier and also has negotiated with several Western countries on the transfer of key defence technologies," Kruse said. *—PTI*

AFTER SOREN, ED ARRESTS 1 MORE IN LAUNDERING CASE

RANCHI, 16 APRIL

The Enforcement Directorate has made a fresh arrest in connection with the money laundering investigation against former Jharkhand chief minister Hemant Soren and others, official sources said Tuesday.

The federal agency also undertook some searches in Ranchi against a person named Antu Tirkey, who is allegedly linked to the case.

The arrested person identified as Afshar Ali was lodged in jail under judicial custody in another money laundering case and the agency has taken his custody in the latest case after seeking a designated court's permission.

Ali is accused of committing "forgery" for allegedly grabbing some land in Jharkhand. This is the fourth arrest in the instant case. *—PTI*

Sunita Kejriwal likely to campaign for AAP in Gujarat

NEW DELHI, 16 APRIL

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's wife Sunita Kejriwal is likely to campaign for the Aam Aadmi Party in Gujarat in the Lok Sabha polls, sources said on Tuesday. The party is likely to announce its list of star campaigners for Gujarat later in the day.

"She is likely to campaign for AAP candidates in Gujarat," a party source said. Chief Minister Kejriwal was arrested by the Enforcement Directorate on 21 March in an excise policy-linked money laundering case. He is currently in judicial custody in Tihar.

Of the 26 Lok Sabha seats in Gujarat, the AAP is fighting two -- Bharuch and Bhavnagar -- as part of the INDIA bloc, while its ally Congress is contesting the remaining 24 seats.

The AAP has fielded Chaitar Vasava from Bharuch and Umesh Makwana from Bhavnagar. The Lok Sabha elections in Gujarat will be held in a single phase on 7 May and the last date for filing nomination papers is 19 April. *—PTI*

- The party is likely to announce its list of star campaigners for Gujarat later in the day

Pinarayi mocks Modi over UP's development index

THRISSUR, 16 APRIL

A day after Prime Minister Narendra Modi attacked LDF government in Kerala over various issues, Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan on Tuesday countered all the charges and urged him to do a self-introspection about the development index of BJP-ruled Uttar Pradesh.

He further said while levelling intense allegations about Kerala, Modi should look into the accolades the state had been bestowed upon by the union government led by him.

To substantiate his point, Vijayan listed a handful of national rankings ranging from Niti Ayog's sustainable development index to health and poverty indexes in which the state ranked top.Vijayan, who was has come under fire

PHOTO: PTI

from Opposition Congress for not targeting Modi, today referred to Modi several times during the press conference and attacked him over his charges against the state government.He accused Modi and BJP of adopting a "hypocritical approach" towards the state, the same as they did in their recently released election manifesto. Vijayan also asserted that BJP would have to settle for a third position in all the 20 constituencies during the LS polls. *—PTI*

CONG WILL RAISE TEA WORKERS' WAGES IN ASSAM, SAYS PRIYANKA

TITABOR, 16 APRIL

Leading a roadshow in support of party candidate Gaurav Gogoi in Jorhat district of Assam, Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on Tuesday said daily wages of tea garden workers will be hiked if the Opposition alliance wins the upcoming Lok Sabha elections.

Addressing a huge crowd while taking part in a road show, she claimed the ruling party also wants to "change" the Constitution and if that happens, the common people of the country will suffer the most.

"I had promised to raise the wages if Congress formed the government. But you chose BJP and the wages were not raised from around Rs 250," she said. *—PTI*

EC TAKES ACTION

Surjewala banned from campaigning for 48 hrs

NEW DELHI, 16 APRIL

The Election Commission on Tuesday reprimanded Congress leader Randeep Surjewala over his alleged derogatory remarks against BJP MP Hema Malini and barred him from campaigning for 48 hours.

This is the first campaign ban imposed by the poll body in this Lok Sabha election cycle.

The Election Commission had last Tuesday issued a show-cause notice to Surjewala for his alleged "undignified, uncivilised and vulgar" remarks against Malini.

In his reply to the show-cause notice, the Congress general secretary had maintained that the video cited by the BJP was "doctored".

The EC rejected his claim and said the district returning officer of Kaithal had noted that the Congress leader had made the remarks on March 31 at Faral village under the Pundri assembly segment and the entire speech was video-

PHOTO: PTI

graphed by the video surveillance team.

The poll watchdog told him that it was convinced that he had made the said statement and thus violated provisions of the model code of conduct.

- This is the first campaign ban imposed by the poll body in this Lok Sabha election cycle

"The commission without prejudice to any order/notice issued or to be issued subsequently to him in the matter relating to MCC violations, hereby, strongly condemns the impugned statement made by him during the election campaign held in Haryana and reprimands Randeep Surjewala . *—PTI*

MODEL CODE OF CONDUCT

Acted more on Cong's plaints: EC

NEW DELHI, 16 APRIL

The Election Commission of India (EC) on Tuesday listed action taken by poll body since enforcement of the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) from 16 March, 2024, with the announcement of the general elections to the Lok Sabha.

The EC shared that among the total complaints, 51 were from the Bharatiya Janata Party, out of which action was taken in 38 cases; 59 were from the Congress, out of which action was taken in 51 cases.

The complaints received from other parties were 90, out of which action has been taken in 80 cases.

EC listed out some "exemplary decisions" that they took during the last one month of Model Code of Conduct to maintain level playing field among the political parties.

The poll body said that they have taken a firm stand to uphold the dignity and honour of women by issuing notices to the leaders of parties who

EC shared that among the total complaints, 51 were from the BJP, out of which action was taken in 38 cases; 59 were from the Cong *PHOTO: PTI*

made derogatory and offensive remarks against women.

The EC said that they have held party presidents accountable for party leaders and campaigners' disrespectful and derogatory comments and the level of response has also been raised.

The poll body has not interfered in matters that could overlap or overrun the legal judicial process, it said. The EC has also cracked down on anonymous hoardings by plugging loopholes in legal provisions.

The poll body has taken legal action against the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) minister for derogatory remarks against the Prime Minister.

The EC has given directions to the Central Board of Direct Taxes for verification of any mismatch in asset declarations by Union Minister Chandrasekharan in his affidavit. *—ANI*

CONG SLAMS INDIA'S ENVOY TO IRELAND

NEW DELHI, 16 APRIL

The Congress on Tuesday took strong objection to the criticism directed at it by the Indian envoy to Ireland while responding to an Irish daily's editorial, saying that attacking opposition parties openly in a manner like a "party apparatchik" was "disgraceful behaviour" and the ambassador should be sacked.

Congress General Secretary Jairam Ramesh hit out at Indian Ambassador Akhilesh Mishra over his remarks in his "rejoinder" to The Irish Times over what the embassy said was a "highly biased and prejudiced editorial, casting aspersion on Prime Minister of India, Shri Narendra Modi, Indian democracy, law enforcement institutions & 'Hindu-majority' people of India".

"This is unprofessional and disgraceful behaviour on his part-but is par for the Modi course I guess," the Congress leader said. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X/@RAJEEV_GOI

Carnatic musician KG Jayan dies at 90

KOCHI, 16 APRIL

Renowned musician KG Jayan, whose extraordinary talent enthralled music enthusiasts with his film compositions and devotional melodies, died in Tripunithura on Tuesday, according to film industry sources here. He was 90. Noted film star Manoj K Jayan is his son. Identified by the brand "Jayavijaya," Jayan and his twin brother KG Vijayan created compositions that deeply moved audiences, evoking feelings of love and devotion, and their music had a significant impact across Kerala. Their musical odyssey began with the creation of a hymn dedicated to Lord Ayyappa. Jayan maintained the musical identity 'Jayavijaya' despite his brother's death. Leader of the Opposition in the State Assembly, VD Satheesan, condoled the demise of Jayan. *—PTI*

Mumbai man cheated of ₹45.69L in trading fraud

THANE, 16 APRIL

A 44-year-old man from Navi Mumbai lost Rs 45.69 lakh to cyber fraudsters who lured him to invest in share trading, an official said on Tuesday. Based on a complaint, a first information report has been registered against five persons under sections 420 (cheating), 406 (criminal breach of trust) and other relevant provisions of the Indian Penal Code and the Information Technology Act, an official from the cyber police station said. The complainant has alleged that the accused contacted him on different social media platforms and lured him to invest in share trading, assuring good returns, the official said. The complainant invested Rs 45.69 lakh between 2 March and 14 April, and has claimed that he did not get any returns. *—PTI*

112 roads closed in Himachal as snow, rain lash state

SHIMLA, 16 APRIL

Adverse weather conditions have led to the closure of 112 roads, including three national highways, in Himachal Pradesh. While isolated areas in the higher hills and tribal regions received light snowfall, the mid and low hills witnessed intermittent rains in the past 24 hours. According to the Meteorological Centre, Shimla, Hansa and Koksar in tribal Lahaul and Spiti have received 5cm and 2cm of snow, respectively. Among the areas which experienced rainfall, Kothi recorded the highest with 63 mm, followed by Chamba with 41mm, Manali with 35mm, Jot with 31mm, Dalhousie with 28 mm, Keylong with 22 mm, Kasol with 19 mm and Kangra (17mm). *—PTI*

No relief for man taking donations using Modi's pic

NEW DELHI, 16 APRIL

The Delhi High Court has refused to quash a First Information Report (FIR) lodged against a man accused of dishonestly inducing the public in giving donations to his NGO by using the picture and surname of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The High Court said the FIR discloses commission of offences and the police has a statutory right and duty to investigate all aspects. It said the investigation is at a nascent stage and the court, while exercising power under Section 482 of the CrPC, ought not to thwart an investigation. "The specific allegations have been made that the petitioner is collecting donations/ funds by using the surname of Hon'ble Prime Minister of India. The picture of Prime Minister has also been used whereas admittedly, the petitioner's surname is not 'MODI',the court said. *—PTI*

How have you checked cow vigilantism: SC asks States

SC gives states 6 weeks to reply, slams them for inaction

NEW DELHI, 16 APRIL

Supreme Court on Tuesday asked various state governments to apprise it in six weeks on the action taken in incidents of mob lynching and cow vigilantism.

A bench of Justices BR Gavai, Aravind Kumar and Sandeep Mehta posted for hearing after six weeks a plea filed by a women's organisation seeking directions to states to take immediate action in consonance with a 2018 verdict of the apex court to effectively deal with incidents of lynching and mob violence against Muslims by cow vigilantes.

"We find that most of the states have not filed their reply affidavits to the writ petition giving instances of mob lynching. It was expected of the states to at least respond to what action has been taken in such cases," the bench ordered. The top court was hearing a plea filed by National Federation of Indian Women (NFIW), an organisation linked to the Communist Party of India in which notices were issued last year to the Centre and the DGPs of Maharashtra, Orissa, Rajasthan, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Haryana seeking their responses to the plea.

The bench questioned the counsel how FIR for cow slaughter was registered without chemical analysis of the meat PHOTO: PTI

During the hearing, advocate Nizam Pasha, appearing for the petitioner organisation, said that in Madhya Pradesh there was an incident of alleged mob-lynching but the FIR was registered for cow slaughter against the victims.

Pasha submitted, "If the state is to deny the incident of mob lynching, then how can 2018 verdict in Tehseen Poonawalla case will be followed." In the Poonawalla case, the top court has issued a slew of directions to States to check incidents of cow vigilantism and mob lynching.

The bench questioned the counsel appearing for the Madhya Pradesh government, as how FIR for cow slaughter was registered without chemical analysis of the meat and why no FIR was registered against those involved in the scuffle.

Pasha pointed out that same thing happened in Haryana where a case for transporting beef was registered but not mob lynching.

"The states are denying that there were any incident of mob lynching and FIRs are being registered for cow slaughter against the victims. Only two states Madhya Pradesh and Haryana have filed their affidavit on incidents pointed out in the writ petition and interlocutory applications but other states have not filed any affidavit," he submitted.

Justice Kumar told Pasha that incidents mentioned in the petitions should not be selectively chosen from particular states but all incidents should be mentioned.

Senior advocate Archana Pathak Dave, appearing for one of the states, said that in the writ petition there is specific averment made that Muslim men are mob lynched and there is no mention of mob lynching of people of other religion.

"The relief sought cannot be religion specific," she said.

Pasha submitted this is the reality of the society and incidents against particular communities can be brought before the court. *—PTI*

Ramdev was present during the hearing and personally tendered an unqualified apology to the apex court PHOTO: PTI

Ramdev in SC line of fire over misleading ads

NEW DELHI, 16 APRIL

The Supreme Court Tuesday granted one-week time to yoga guru Ramdev, his aide Balkrishna and Patanjali Ayurved to issue a public apology in the misleading advertisements case, but said it was not letting them "off the hook" now.

Both Ramdev and Balkrishna were present during the hearing and personally tendered an unqualified apology to the apex court.

A bench of Justices Hima Kohli and Ahsanuddin Amanullah took note of their apologies, but made it clear that at this stage it has not decided to "let them off the hook".

The Supreme Court warned yoga guru Ramdev and his aide against any attempt to "degrade allopathy" and permitted them to tender a "public apology and show contrition" within a week in the contempt proceedings in the misleading advertisements case against Patanjali Ayurved Ltd.

Ramdev, who also interacted with the bench, said he had no intention to show disrespect to the court in any manner.

However, the bench told Balkrishna that they (Patanjali) are not so innocent that they didn't know what the top court had said in its earlier orders in the case.

"I am willing to give a public apology," senior advocate Mukul Rohatgi, appearing for Ramdev and Balkrishna, told the bench at the outset.

The apex court asked Ramdev and Balkrishna, both of whom were present in the court, to come forward for an interaction with the bench. "They should feel they have a connect with the court," the bench said.

The apex court has now posted the matter for further hearing on 23 April.

Ramdev and Balkrishna had last week tendered an "unconditional and unqualified apology" before the top court over advertisements issued by the firm making tall claims about the medicinal efficacy of its products. *—PTI*

HATE CRIMES

Attacks on Hindus in US on the rise: US Congressman

NEW DELHI, 16 APRIL

Observing that there is a substantial increase in attacks against Hindus in the US, an Indian-American Congressman has said that this was just the "beginning of a coordinated anti-Hindu attack", as he asked the community members to unite against hate crimes.

"Today I am seeing in the United States a substantial increase in attacks on Hinduism. A lot of misinformation is being circulated whether it is online or otherwise," Thanedar said.

Thanedar and four other Indian-American lawmakers - Ro Khanna, Raja Krishnamoorthi, Ami Bera and Pramila Jayapal - had recently written to the Department of Justice seeking an investigation on the recent surge in attacks on Hindu temples and places of worship.

At the press conference organised by HinduAction, a non-profit body, Thanedar complained that no action has been taken against those responsible for the attacks and no arrests have been made either.

He complained that no action has been taken against those responsible for the attacks PHOTO: X/HINDUAMERICAN

"I recently joined four of my Indian-American colleagues to write to the Department of Justice. You know, one of the concerns that we had was the rising attacks on places of worship," Thanedar said.

Thanedar alleged that often local law enforcement enters into these investigations which go nowhere.

He said it leaves the community feeling like they have nobody who cares about them. That means that the community continues to live in fear. The community continues to live in an adverse situation with essentially no help from law enforcement, he added.

Thanedar said that there is a need to coordinate efforts between the local law enforcement, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and the Department of Justice.

"A higher priority needs to be assigned to such hate crimes against this peaceful community," he said. *—PTI*

Aditya Srivastava PHOTO: X/@SONAL GOEL IAS

ADITYA SRIVASTAVA SECURES TOP RANK IN UPSC 2023 EXAM

NEW DELHI, 16 APRIL

The Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) on Tuesday declared the results for the Civil Services Exam 2023, with Aditya Srivastava securing the top rank. Animesh Pradhan and Donuru Ananya Reddy secured the second and third ranks respectively, it said. A total of 1,016 candidates cleared the examination and have been recommended for different central government services, the UPSC said.

The Civil Services Exam is conducted annually in three stages -- preliminary, main and interview -- by the UPSC. *—PTI*

7 die after tempo collides with crane in Patna

PATNA, 16 APRIL

Seven people died on Tuesday after a tempo carrying them collided head-on with a crane near Kankarbagh bypass in Patna, police said.

The crane was engaged in the ongoing metro rail work in the area, they said. "While four died on the spot, three others died while being taken to the nearest hospital.

The bodies have been sent for post-mortem examination," the Patna Police said on X.

The deceased are yet to be identified. *—PTI*

Egg donated for mosque gets ₹2.26L in auction

SOPORE, 16 APRIL

An egg donated to raise money for the construction of a mosque in this apple town in north Kashmir's Baramulla district has helped raise Rs 2.26 lakh in an auction, the committee managing the religious place has said.

The heartwarming gesture has come to the fore from Malpore village in Sopore, 55 kilometre from Srinagar, where the local mosque committee started collecting donations both in cash and in kind.

An elderly woman, who has requested anonymity, said she donated a freshly laid egg by her chicken.

All donations made in kind were put up for auction and the egg turned out to be the most sought after.

A local resident said people bid on the egg for three days and after every round, the successful bidder paid the amount they bid and then returned the egg to the committee as a donation to raise more money.

On the final day of the auction, a young businessman named Danish Ahmad bought the egg for a whopping Rs 70,000.

Ahmad, who hails from the neighbouring Warpora area, said, "We are very eager to complete the construction of this mosque at the earliest. As the mosque is planned to be big, the funds needed are also rather large."

According to Ahmad, after several rounds of auction, the cumulative funds raised by bidders for the egg was a staggering Rs 2,26,350. *—PTI*

On the final day of the auction, a businessman named Danish Ahmad bought the egg for a whopping Rs 70,000 PHOTO: X/@FAROOQGANDERBAL

JNU students boycott classes, protest

NEW DELHI, 16 APRIL

Many students at the Jawaharlal Nehru University here on Tuesday participated in a strike to protest against the administration's neglect of their demands, including "inaction" over a sexual harassment complaint.

Classes in various departments, including Social Sciences, Physical Science, School of International Students and School of Language, Arts and Aesthetics, and Computer Sciences, were stalled amid the strike.

The protest call was given by the Jawaharlal Nehru University Students Union (JNUSU), which has demanded an expeditious investigation into a sexual harassment incident and action against those accused.

On 31 March, a woman JNU student filed a complaint with the administration against four individuals, including two former students of the university, for allegedly passing sexually derogatory comments at her while she was taking a walk at the JNU Ring Road in the early hours of the day.

The union has also asked the administration to take necessary steps to ensure the safety of the victim against alleged attempts at intimidation.

"The JNUSU will observe a complete university strike on 16 April if JNU VC fails to address pressing concerns of students by 15 April," it had said on Saturday.The students union has also released a charter of demands, *—PTI*

'Accused opened fire outside Salman's home to kill him'

The accused, Vicky Gupta and Sagar Pal both residents of Bihar, were on the run after the firing incident outside Khan's house PHOTO: ANI

MUMBAI, 16 APRIL

The Mumbai police's crime branch on Tuesday submitted to a local court that the two arrested accused opened fire outside Bollywood superstar Salman Khan's house here "in an attempt to kill him".

The accused, Vicky Gupta,24, and Sagar Pal,21, both residents of Bihar, were on the run after the firing incident outside Khan's house at the Galaxy Apartment in Bandra area here early Sunday morning.

They were apprehended late Monday night from Mata No Madh village in Gujarat's Kutch district and later brought to Mumbai.The police sought their custody for 14 days on the ground that custodial interrogation was required to unearth the conspiracy behind the incident. *—PTI*

ORF REPORT SAYS

Unemployment rate to dip by 2028

NEW DELHI, 16 APRIL

India's unemployment rate is likely to decline by as much as 97 basis points by 2028 as the country's economy hits the USD 5 trillion mark, fuelling a rise in employment, a new report said on Tuesday.

Unemployment rate -- the percentage of people in the labour force who are without jobs -- is projected to fall from 4.47 per cent in 2024 to 3.68 per cent in 2028, the India Employment Outlook 2030 report by thinktank Observer Research Foundation (ORF) said.

"India's job market is experiencing a transformation as the country has become the world's fastest growing large economy in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic," the report said.

The country's young population, whose median age is 28.4 years, holds a key to fuelling economic expansion.

Percentage of people in the labour force who are without jobs to fall from 4.47 per cent in 2024 to 3.68 per cent in 2028 PHOTO: FREEPIK

"With a GDP growth rate of 7.8 per cent, India could potentially achieve its target of becoming a USD 5-trillion economy by 2026-27, with such growth being underpinned by strong private consumption and public investment," it said.

India's gross domestic product (GDP) size is estimated at just under USD 4 trillion in 2024.

An ORF press statement said the report identifies sectors that the country's 600-million-plus population of people aged 18-35 years regard as aspirational, as these sectors could act as engines of growth in the years ahead.

"The report forecasts that as India approaches its USD 5 trillion goal, overall employment could rise 22 per cent, while unemployment could decline by 97 basis points by 2028," the statement said.

The service sector in particular is set to witness significant job creation with each unit rise in services output expected to contribute to a substantial 0.12 per cent increase in employment.

The burgeoning service sector also offers encouraging avenues for women's employment. Hence, investing in women's skilling, financial inclusion, and entrepreneurship needs to be prioritised further, argues the report. *—PTI*

WORLD RECORD

Students of Lovely Professional University showcase 10,829 tri-coloured 'macarons', arranged to resemble the Indian national flag, in Jalandhar. The students set the new world record for 'the largest display of meringue-based sandwich cookies, known as Macarons', surpassing the previous record of 9,600 ***PHOTO: PTI***

Centre reveals forest records after 28 years

SEVEN STATES MISS DEADLINE

The Forest Act, 1980 was amended to Van Sanrakshan Evam Adhiniyam, 2023 by Centre. This was done with an aim to bring clarity to a 28-year-old issue in defining forest as per the Godavarman judgment ***PHOTO: ANI***

As many as 27 states and Union Territories (UT) have furnished details about their records concerning forests, according to the interim judgment passed by the Supreme Court on 2 February, 2024.

However, the information submitted is not uniform and helps little in understanding the status of Indian forests.

Earlier this year, the Supreme Court issued an interim directive to the Centre to refer to its understanding of 'forest' as "broad and all-encompassing" in order to classify India's forests as per the order given in the TN Godavarman judgement of December 1996.

The order came in the backdrop of a Public Interest Litigation — Ashok Kumar Sharma, IFS (Retd.) & Ors -Vs- Union of India & Ors — challenging the constitutionality of the Van Sanrakshan Evam Adhiniyam, 2023.

The Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980 was amended to Van Sanrakshan Evam Adhiniyam, 2023 by the Centre. This was done with an aim to bring clarity to a 28-year-old issue in defining 'forest' as per the Godavarman judgment.

In a landmark judgment case — TN Godavarman Thirumalpad v. Union of India (December 12, 1996) — the court ruled that 'forest' has to be understood in terms of its dictionary meaning, irrespective of ownership.

The Godavarman judgment had also included forest-like areas, un-classed forests and community forest lands, including non-notified forest in its ambit.

As per the order, the states and UTs were expected to form expert committees to identify forest areas within a month of the 1996 Godavarman order issued on December 12. The apex court, in its order in the Ashok Sharma case in February, had directed the central government to make the state expert committee (SEC) reports public by 15 April.

However, the information uploaded on the government site does not include forest records of seven states — Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Manipur, Sikkim, Tamil Nadu, Telangana and Tripura.

- Union ministry of environment, forest and climate change (MoEFCC) states that 0.167 million sq of forest areas lie outside notified forests. But as the records do not detail the geographical locations of these forest areas, it becomes difficult to identify them

Other states and UTs — Himachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, West Bengal and Ladakh — do not mention any information about forest records.

Most of the information provided by the states reveal no details on the geographical locations of forest areas, including 'un-classed' or 'deemed forest' areas.

Prakriti Srivastava, Kerala's the petitioners in the case, said that having no information on 'un-classed' or 'deemed forest' is concerning as with the new amendment, they stand to lose protection provided by the Godavarman judgement.

This is contrary to the Centre's claims of having records. " 'Deemed forests' as identified by expert committees of the states have been taken on record and hence the provision of the Act will be applicable in such lands also..." the joint parliamentary committee documents released in 2023 noted.

States and UTs such as Jharkhand, Karnataka, Uttarakhand, Andaman and Nicobar islands, Bihar as well as Dadra and Nagar Haveli have given generic figures and there is no data on 'un-classed forests'.

Supreme Court, in its 2011 LaFarge judgment, had demand detailed information on location of forests with geo-referencing and clear demarcation.

As per the Forest Survey of India, the Union ministry of that 0.167 million sq of forest areas lie outside notified forests. But as the records do not detail the geographical locations of these forest areas, it becomes difficult to identify them. Hence, they could be lost.

Srivastava said, "A closer look into the information shows there are no geographical locations detailed for any forests. This is a very serious issue for un-classed forest identification as these will not be getting protection under the new amended Act and will be lost very soon, if not already gone."

She said the SEC reports put online by MoEFCC have not identified unclassed forests. The ministry has misguided the JPC that these reports identify all forests which will be accorded protection by the Adhiniyam.

However, these reports prove that unclassed forests are not identifable and therefore it is not known as to how much area has already been lost to diversions and encroachments. *—Downtoearth*

LETTERS write to us at salar@salar.news

SALAR

Marine 'coldwaves' killing wildlife due to climate change

The effects of ocean warming are profound and well-documented. But sometimes changes in the patterns of winds and ocean currents cause seawater to suddenly cool, instead.

Surface temperatures can plummet rapidly — by 10°C or more over a day or two. When these conditions persist for several days or weeks, the area experiences a "coldwave", which is the opposite of more familiar marine heatwaves.

Sudden short-term cooling can affect marine life ***PHOTO: PIXABAY***

What's going on?

Certain wind and current conditions can cause the sea surface to cool, rather than warm. This happens when winds and currents force coastal waters to move offshore, which are then replaced from below by cold water from the deep ocean. This process is known as upwelling.

In some places, such as California on the US west coast, upwelling happens regularly along hundreds of kilometres of coastline. But localised upwelling can occur seasonally on a smaller scale, too, often at the edges of bays on the east coasts of continents due to interactions of wind, current and coastline.

Mass deaths warrant investigation

During the extreme upwelling event along the south-east coast of South Africa in March 2021, at least 260 animals from 81 species died. These included tropical fish, sharks and rays.

To investigate the ramifications for marine fauna, we took a closer look at bull sharks. We tagged sharks with tracking devices that also record depth and temperature.

When running and hiding isn't enough

Bull sharks survive environmental conditions that would kill most other marine life. For example, they're often found several hundred kilometres up rivers, where other marine life would not venture.

This sudden, severe drop paired with the long duration made this event particularly deadly. If future events will continue to become more severe, mass deaths of marine life could become a more common sight – especially along the world's mid-latitude east coasts.

Still learning how climate change will play out

Overall, our oceans are warming. The ranges of tropical and subtropical species are extending towards the poles. But along some major current systems, sudden short-term cooling can make life difficult for these climate migrants, or even kill them. Especially if events like the one in South Africa become more common. Tropical migrants would increasingly be living on the edge of what they are comfortable with in these areas.

This really shows the complexity of climate change, as tropical species would expand into higher-latitude areas as overall warming continues, which then places them at risk of exposure to sudden extreme cold events.

The need to limit our impacts on the planet by reducing greenhouse-gas emissions has never been more urgent, nor has been the need for research into what our future might hold. *—PTI*

Certain wind and current conditions cause the sea surface to cool rather than warm ***PHOTO: PIXABAY***

Villagers displaced by Assam's 2001 floods still await new homes

It has been nearly two-and-a-half-decades since a bustling village perished to erosion in Assam's Lakhimpur district, and for an entire generation, homes were all but temporary shacks on the embankment of river Subansiri.

The residents of Kasomari village, which was swept away following floods in 2001, were finally rehabilitated in 2018 to the 'No. 1 Hindu Adarsha Gaon' (model village), about five kms from here.

Locals, however, claimed that the process of land allotment and introduction of welfare schemes have moved at a glacial pace in the new village, though Lakhimpur MP Pradan Baruah maintained that swift progress has been made in the last couple of years.

Monikanta Das, a resident of the model village, said they had got in touch with the state government for land soon after settling on the embankment, but it was only in 2012 that the land advisory committee approved a plot for rehabilitating them.

"For over five years, due to some political pressure, we were not handed over the land. It took a Right to Information Act application for the allotment to be made on 9 April, 2018," Das claimed.

Allotment was made for 153 families as per the original list, though the number increased to about 220 by 2018.

"Moreover, each family was given only a small piece of land for building houses. We were also told funds will be provided under the Model Village Scheme, but are still awaiting it," Das, in his late 40s who sells fish at the local market, said.

Another villager said due to non-allotment of agricultural land, they have to work as daily wage labourers in nearby areas to eke out a living.

"We are a family of seven members, but don't have land for cultivation. I appeal to the government to provide some land for farming," he said.

Annual flooding followed the villagers to their new address, too, with the women facing more difficulties in such situations, said Matu Das, a housewife.

"During floods, people cannot move around. If any house at an elevated level has a toilet, we use it. We somehow survive the monsoons," she said.

Das said some government facilities like ration card, health insurance and subsidised LPG cylinders have been made available to them, but many like her are still awaiting enrolment in the 'Orunudoi' scheme, under which the woman of the house receives Rs 1,250 per month in their bank accounts.

Residents of Kasomari village, which was swept away during 2001 floods were finally rehabilitated in 2018 to the No 1 Hindu Adarsha Gaon, 5km away from Lakhimpur ***PHOTO: ANI***

A worker at the local anganwadi centre claimed it is also in a state of neglect in this model village, inhabited by people belonging to the Scheduled Caste.

Deepa Chutia Das of the Kolioni Anganwadi Kendra said her repeated pleas before the authorities to fix the centre, which needs proper roofing and bamboo walls, have fallen on deaf ears.

"I have submitted applications to our office. We also send photos of the kendra on a daily basis. The authorities are well aware of the situartion, but do nothing," she said.

- The 600-odd voters of this village in a constituency with an electorate of over 15 lakh may not be a deciding factor in the polls, but they represent the scores of villagers displaced by floods and erosion

Chutia Das said many children who come to the centre also refuse to eat the packaged food provided to them due to quality issues, and she has informed her seniors about the matter.

MP Pradan Baruah, who is seeking a third successive term from Lakhimpur on a BJP ticket, however, asserted that work for providing basic public infrastructure has started.

"We arranged for land for these people, and we are now gradually trying to provide them with the infrastructure. Facilities like ration card and electricity connection have already been made available. But, there are some people who have not been allotted houses, and there is the problem of water logging, too," Baruah said.

Gokul Bharali, a local youth, who, along with a few others, strive to address some of the issues faced by the villagers, said work has been fast-tracked in the last couple of years.

Bharali claimed that a main road is being constructed, Rs 5 lakh has been allocated for a 'namghar' (community prayer hall), a water tank was built at a cost of Rs 1.5 crore, and Rs 8 lakh has been provided for building toilets and providing drinking water facility at the local school.

He also said that most families have got houses under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana, while agreements for more have been signed and funds for the beneficiaries will likely be released after the Lok Sabha elections.

"Some villagers may try to indulge in party politics. But for us, development of our village comes first and we will work together with the ruling regime to address concerns," Bharali asserted.

The 600-odd voters of this village in a constituency with an electorate of over 15 lakh may not be a deciding factor in the polls, but they represent the scores of villagers displaced by floods and erosion in the area, and their expectations from the elected leaders for securing a better future. *—PTI*

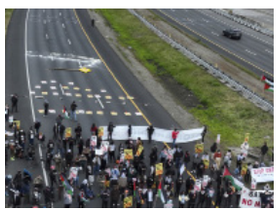


PHOTO: X@WCMUNEWS

US: Pro-Palestinian protests shut down airport highways

CHICAGO, 16 APRIL

Pro-Palestinian demonstrators blocked roadways in Illinois, California, New York and the Pacific Northwest on Monday, temporarily shutting down travel into some of the nation's most heavily used airports, onto the Golden Gate and Brooklyn bridges and on a busy West Coast highway.

In Chicago, protesters linked arms and blocked lanes of Interstate 190 leading into O'Hare International Airport around 7 am in a demonstration they said was part of a global "economic blockade to free Palestine," according to Rifqa Falaneh, one of the organizers. Traffic in the San Francisco Bay Area was snarled for hours as demonstrators shut down all vehicle, pedestrian and bike traffic on the Golden Gate Bridge and chained themselves to 55-gallon drums filled with cement across Interstate 880 in Oakland. Protesters marching into Brooklyn blocked Manhattan-bound traffic on the Brooklyn Bridge. *—PTI*

14 people killed in bus-pickup truck collision in B'desh

DHAKA, 16 APRIL

At least 14 people, including five members of a family, were killed on Tuesday when a bus and a pick-up truck collided head-on in Bangladesh's Dhaka-Khulna highway, police said. The accident occurred in Faridpur when a bus bound for Magura city in the Khulna Division collided with a Dhaka-bound pick-up truck, leaving 11 people dead on the spot, the Dhaka Tribune newspaper quoted police as saying. Police said that two persons died while being taken to hospital and another died undergoing treatment. Those killed were the passengers, driver and helper of the pick-up truck, which was also carrying 15 passengers, including the driver's helper. The Daily Star news portal, which reported the death toll as 13, said that those killed included seven women, three men, and three children. Among those killed were five members of the same family, the bdnews24 news portal reported. Earlier, Deputy Commissioner Md Kamrul Ahsan Talukder and Superintendent of Police Mohammad Morshed Alam visited the accident site. The government gave an immediate grant of Tk 20,000 for the burial of those killed, and a grant of the same amount for those who are under treatment, Talukder was quoted as saying in the report. *—PTI*

Maui Dept to release after-action report on Hawaii wildfires

HONOLULU, 16 APRIL

The Maui Fire Department is expected to release a report Tuesday detailing how the agency responded to a series of wildfires that burned on the island during a windstorm last August including one that killed 101 people in the historic town of Lahaina and became the deadliest US wildfire in more than a century. The release comes one day before the Hawaii Attorney General is expected to release the first phase of a separate comprehensive investigation about the events before, during and after the 8 August fires. The reports could help officials understand exactly what happened when the wind-whipped fire overtook the historic Maui town of Lahaina, destroying roughly 3,000 properties and causing more than $5.5 billion in estimated damage, according to state officials. The Western Fire Chiefs Association produced the after-action report for the Maui Fire Department. After-action reports are frequently used by military organizations, emergency response agencies, government entities and even companies to help identify the strengths and weaknesses of the organisation's response to an emergency. *—AP*

Israel vows to strike Iran

The US has urged Israel to show restraint

JERUSALEM, 16 APRIL

Israel's military chief said Monday that his country will respond to Iran's weekend attack, but he did not elaborate on when and how as world leaders urged against retaliation, trying to avoid a spiral of violence in the Middle East.

The Iranian attack on Saturday came in response to a suspected Israeli strike two week earlier on an Iranian consular building in the Syrian capital of Damascus that killed two Iranian generals. It marked the first time Iran has launched a direct military assault on Israel despite decades of enmity dating back to the country's 1979 Islamic Revolution.

Iran launched hundreds of drones, ballistic missiles and cruise missiles at Israel in the attack. The Israeli military said that 99 per cent of the drones and missiles were intercepted, by Israel's own air defences and warplanes and in coordination with a US-led coalition of partners.

Israeli military chief Lt Gen Herzi Halevi said Monday that Israel is considering its next steps but that the Iranian strike "will be met with a response." Halevi gave no details.

The army's spokesman, Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari, said Israel will respond "at the time that we choose."

Both men spoke at the Nevatim air base in southern Israel, which Hagari said suffered only light damage in the Iranian attack. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has been huddling with top officials to discuss a possible response. For a second straight day, the government made no announcements on any decisions.

Israeli military chief Lt Gen Herzi Halevi said Monday that Israel is considering its next steps PHOTO: PTI

In a conversation with US House Majority Leader Steve Scalise, Netanyahu said that "Israel will do whatever is required to defend itself," the Prime Minister's office announced.

While Israeli leaders have hinted at retaliation, the government is under heavy international pressure not to further escalate the conflict — especially after the Iranian strike caused such little damage.

The US has urged Israel to show restraint as it seeks to build a broad diplomatic response.

While Maj Gen Pat Ryder, Pentagon press secretary, said any response is up to Israel to decide, he added: "We don't want to see escalation, but we obviously will take necessary measures to protect our forces in the region."

The US also has been working in recent years to strengthen ties between Israel and moderate Arab states in an alliance to counter Iran.

Much of that cooperation has been under the umbrella of the US Central Command, which oversees US military operations in the Middle East. Centcom works closely with militaries across the region, including Israel, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and other Arab countries. *—AP*

Do Iran and Israel have nuclear weapons?

1 Israel is assumed to have its own nuclear weapons but maintains an official policy of deliberate ambiguity.

2 Iran does not have nuclear weapons and also denies it is attempting to use its civilian nuclear programme to become a nuclear armed state.

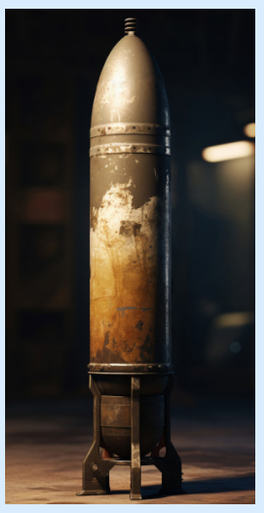


PHOTO: FREEPIK

STATE OF EMERGENCY DECLARED

At least 21 people had died in Punjab officials said, where more rains expected this week PHOTO: PTI

Lightning, rains kill 49 in Pakistan, many injured

ISLAMABAD, 16 APRIL

Lightning and heavy rains have killed at least 49 people across Pakistan in the past three days, officials said Monday, as authorities in the country's southwest declared a state of emergency.

Some deaths occurred when lightning struck farmers harvesting wheat. Rains caused dozens of houses to collapse in the northwest and in eastern Punjab province. Arfan Kathia, a spokesman for the provincial disaster management authority, said 21 people had died in Punjab, where more rains were expected this week.

Khursheed Anwar, a spokesman for the disaster management authority in northwestern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province bordering Afghanistan, said 21 people died there.

Rain also lashed the capital, Islamabad, and killed seven people in southwestern Baluchistan province. Streets flooded in the northwestern city of Peshawar and in Quetta, the Baluchistan capital. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said in televised remarks that he had ordered authorities to provide relief aid.

Pakistan's water reservoirs would improve because of the rains, he said. Rafay Alam, a Pakistani environmental expert, said such heavy April rainfall is unusual.

"Two years ago, Pakistan witnessed a heat wave in March and April and now we are witnessing rains and it is all of because of climate change, which had caused heavy flooding in 2022," he said. *—AP*

PLUMES OF SMOKE

Denmark's historic old stock exchange building in the centre of Copenhagen has been engulfed by fire. The 17th Century Børsen is one of the city's oldest buildings and onlookers gasped as its iconic spire collapsed in the flames. Everyone inside the building was able to leave and people rushed to rescue some of its historic paintings. Culture minister Jakob Engel-Schmidt said 400 years of Danish cultural heritage had gone up in flames. *—BBC News*

Pak sustained n-programme during crisis: US

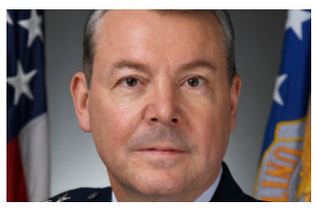
WASHINGTON, 16 APRIL

Pakistan sustained its nuclear modernisation efforts last year despite its economic turmoil as its contentious relationship with India continues to drive its defence policy, the top US intelligence official has told Congress.

The remarks by Lt Gen Jeffrey Kruse, Director of the Defence Intelligence Agency came during a Congressional hearing on China on Monday???.

Kruse told lawmakers that Pakistan has sought international support, including from the UN Security Council, to resolve its dispute with India about Kashmir. Separately, Islamabad and New Delhi have maintained an uneasy ceasefire along the shared Line of Control since February 2021, he said.

"Pakistan has sustained its nuclear modernisation efforts despite its economic turmoil. Terrorist violence against Pakistani security forces and civilians also rose last year," he said. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, Pakistan is reported to have 170 nuclear warheads as of January 2023. Cash-strapped Pakistan is banking on close allies like China and Saudi Arabia for loans to tide over its economic woes. Moreover, Pakistan's finance minister Muhammad Aurangzeb is now in Washington to discuss a new loan package with the International Monetary Fund.



Lt. Gen. Jeffrey Kruse, Director of the Defense Intelligence Agency. PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA

Pakistan's contentious relationship with India continues to drive its defence policy, Kruse told top American lawmakers.

However, cross-border violence between the countries has decreased since their February 2021 recommitment to a ceasefire, he said.

"Islamabad is modernising its nuclear arsenal and improving the security of its nuclear materials and nuclear C2 (command and control). In October, Pakistan successfully tested its Ababeel medium-range ballistic missile," he said. In 2023, militants killed approximately 400 security forces, a nine-year high, and Pakistani security forces have conducted almost daily counterterrorism operations during the past year.

Islamabad and New Delhi have a long history of strained relations, primarily due to the Kashmir issue as well as the cross-border terrorism emanating from Pakistan. *—PTI*

Sunak faces resistance over his smoking ban plans

LONDON, 16 APRIL

British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak faces very vocal resistance against his plans to effectively ban smoking for anyone aged 15 and younger as a new bill comes up for a vote in the House of Commons on Tuesday.

The British Indian leader proposed the Tobacco and Vapes Bill last year and declared his vision for creating a "smokefree generation" by making it an offence to sell tobacco products to anyone born after 1 January, 2009, which covers children aged 15.

Once it clears its parliamentary journey, the new legislation will introduce some of the world's strictest anti-smoking laws in the country. "I propose that in future we raise the smoking age by one year, every year," Sunak had declared at the Conservative Party conference in October last year.

As there is Opposition backing for the bill in Parliament and governing Conservative MPs have a free vote on the bill, any Tory votes against the bill will not be seen as a full-blown rebellion against the Prime Minister. *—PTI*

China's economy grew 5.3%, beating expectations

HONG KONG, 16 APRIL

China's economy expanded at a faster than expected pace in the first three months of the year, helped by policies aimed at stimulating growth and stronger demand, the government said Tuesday.

The world's second-largest economy expanded at a 5.3 per cent annual pace in January-March, beating analysts' forecasts of about 4.8 per cent, official data show. Compared to the previous quarter, the economy grew 1.6 per cent.

China's economy has struggled to bounce back from the Covid-19 pandemic, with a slowdown in demand and a property crisis weighing on its growth. The better-than-expected data Tuesday came days after China reported its exports sank 7.5 per cent in March compared to the year before, while imports also weakened. Inflation cooled, reflecting deflationary pressures resulting from slack demand amid a crisis in the property sector.

The world's second-largest economy expanded at a 5.3 per cent annual pace in January-March PHOTO: FREEPIK

Industrial output for the first quarter was up 6.1 per cent compared to the same time last year, and retail sales grew at an annual pace of 4.7 per cent. Fixed investment, in factories and equipment, grew 4.5 per cent compared to the same period a year earlier.

The strong growth in January-March was supported by "broad manufacturing outperformance," festivities-boosted household spending due to the Lunar New Year holidays and policies that helped boost investments, according to China economist Louise Loo of Oxford Economics. Loo noted that an unwinding of excess inventory, normalisation of household spending after the holidays and a cautious approach to government spending and other stimulus will affect growth in this quarter. *—AP*

UAE WEATHER

Stay-home advisory issued as heavy rains lash all Emirates

DUBAI, 16 APRIL

Heavy rains lashed the United Arab Emirates on Tuesday, flooding out portions of major highways and leaving vehicles abandoned on roadways across Dubai.

The rains began overnight, leaving massive ponds on streets as whipping winds disrupted flights at Dubai International Airport, the world's busiest for international travel and the home of the long-haul carrier Emirates. Police and emergency personnel drove slowly through the flooded streets, their emergency lights flashing across the darkened morning. Lightning flashed across the sky, occasionally touching the tip of the Burj Khalifa, the world's tallest building.

Schools across the UAE, a federation of seven sheikhdoms, largely shut ahead of the storm and government employees were largely working remotely if able. Many workers stayed home as well, though some ventured out, with the unfortunate stalling out their vehicles in deeper-than-expected water covering some roads.

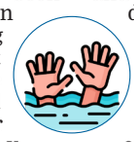
The rains began overnight, leaving massive ponds on streets PHOTO: KHALEEJTIMES

Authorities sent tanker trucks out into the streets and highways to pump away the water. Rain is unusual in the UAE, an arid, Arabian Peninsula nation, but occurs periodically during the cooler winter months. Many roads and other areas lack drainage given the lack of regular rainfall, causing flooding.

Initial estimates suggested over 30 millimeters (1 inch) of rain fell over the morning in Dubai, with as much as 128 mm of rain expected throughout the day. Rain also fell in Bahrain, Qatar and Saudi Arabia. *—Khaleej Times*

Sudden heavy rains in Oman kill at least 18

DUBAI, 16 APRIL



In Oman, a sultanate that rests on the eastern edge of the Arabian Peninsula, at least 18 people had been killed in heavy rains in recent days, according to a statement Tuesday from the country's National Committee for Emergency Management. That includes some 10 schoolchildren swept away in a vehicle with an adult, which saw condolences come into the country from rulers across the region.

Civil defense officials gave the death toll for the rains, which saw Oman's North Al Sharqiyah province hardest hit. The Royal Oman Police and the Omani military deployed to the province to transport citizens out of flooded areas, the state-run Oman News Agency reported. Heavy rainfall often causes flash flooding in the sultanate, drawing the curious from their homes to nearby dry riverbeds, known in Arabic as "wadi." In flooding, they can quickly fill and wash away people and vehicles. *—AP*

Rupee falls 9 paise to 83.53 against US dollar

MUMBAI, 16 APRIL

The rupee depreciated 9 paise to 83.53 against the US dollar in early trade on Tuesday, weighed down by a strong American currency and elevated crude oil prices. Forex traders said a negative trend in domestic equities and sustained foreign fund outflows also dented investor sentiments. According to interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 83.51 against the dollar and touched a low of 83.53 in the initial trade, registering a fall of 9 paise over its previous close. Rupee fell further as foreign portfolio investors continued to buy dollars and sell stocks on risk aversion due to Middle East tensions and US yields heading higher, said Anil Kumar Bhansali, Head of Treasury and Executive Director, Finrex Treasury Advisors LLP. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was at 106.34, higher by 0.13 per cent. *—PTI*

Gold, silver prices hit fresh peaks on global cues

NEW DELHI, 14 APRIL

Extending gains for the second day in a row, gold and silver prices hit fresh all-time high levels on Tuesday, tracking strong trends in the international markets According to HDFC Securities, gold prices zoomed Rs 700 to hit its lifetime high of Rs 73,750 per 10 grams in the national capital on Tuesday. It had closed at Rs 73,050 per 10 grams on Monday. Similarly, silver price jumped Rs 800 to hit a record high of Rs 86,500 per kg. In the global markets, spot gold at Comex was trading at USD 2,370 per ounce, up by USD 15 from the previous close. Silver was also quoting higher at USD 28.40 per ounce. In the previous close, it was USD 28.25 per ounce. *—PTI*

BharatPe elevates Nalin Negi as full-time CEO

NEW DELHI, 16 APRIL

Fintech firm BharatPe on Tuesday said it has elevated its interim CEO and chief financial officer Nalin Negi as full-time chief executive officer. Negi was given charge of interim CEO in January 2023 after then CEO Suhail Sameer stepped down from the post. "We look forward to supporting Nalin Negi in his new role and are grateful for his tremendous contribution as the interim CEO. His extensive experience in the fintech industry and the growth witnessed for BharatPe under his leadership, makes him a natural choice to lead the company," BharatPe, Chairman of the board, Rajnish Kumar said. Under Negi's leadership, BharatPe recorded 182 per cent increase in revenue from operations in FY'23 and October 2023 was the first earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation, and amortization (EBITDA) positive month. BharatPe will institute a search for the appointment of a new CFO, the statement . *—PTI*

Flipkart's annual sale for ACs to begin from 17 April

NEW DELHI, 16 APRIL

Flipkart on Tuesday announced its annual week-long summer sale starting from 17 April to 23 April, 2024, offering a wide selection of cooling home appliances such as air conditioners (ACs), refrigerators, air coolers, and fans at affordable prices. The e-commerce marketplace's 6th edition of Super Cooling Days 2024 will provide customers with deals on cooling home appliances to beat the summer heat, Flipkart said in a statement. A premium store will be showcased for a variety of brands for ACs of the likes of LG, Voltas, Godrej, Daikin, Panasonic, and Blue Star in the price range of Rs 25,000 to Rs 65,000. The sale will feature an extensive range of Inverter ACs ranging from 0.8 ton to 2 ton with advanced tech features like Wi-Fi connectivity and energy-efficient ratings. Flipkart will also offer a vast array of choices on ceiling fans ranging from Rs 1,299 to Rs 15,000. *—PTI*

Markets continue to slump for third day

This is amid escalating tensions in Middle East

MUMBAI, 16 APRIL

Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty continued to slump on Tuesday dragged down by heavy selling in IT stocks amid weak global trends and fears of escalating tensions in the Middle East.

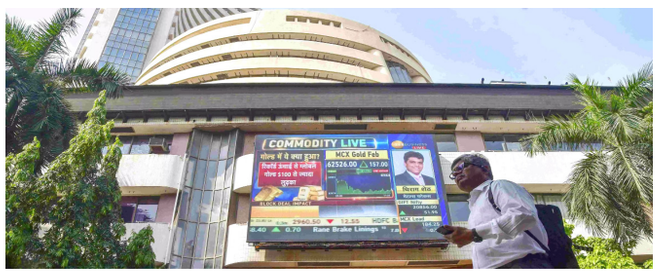
Continuing its downtrend for the third day running, the 30-share BSE Sensex tanked 456.10 points or 0.62 per cent to settle at 72,943.68. During the day, it slumped 714.75 points or 0.97 per cent to 72,685.03.

The NSE Nifty declined 124.60 points or 0.56 per cent to finish at 22,147.90.

From the Sensex basket, Infosys, IndusInd Bank, Bajaj Finserv, Wipro, HCL Technologies, Bajaj Finance, Tech Mahindra, Tata Consultancy Services, and Larsen & Toubro were the major laggards.

Titan Company, Hindustan Unilever, HDFC Bank, Maruti, ITC, Power Grid and Reliance Industries were the gainers.

In Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo, Shanghai, and Hong Kong settled lower.



BSE Sensex settles at 72,943.68 while NSE Nifty declines 124.6 points

PHOTO: PTI

- Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty continued to slump on Tuesday dragged down by heavy selling in IT stocks amid weak global trends and fears of escalating tensions in the Middle East.

European markets were quoting in the red. Wall Street ended in negative territory on Monday.Israel's military chief said on Monday that his country will respond to Iran's weekend attack, but he did not elaborate on when and how as world leaders urged against retaliation, trying to avoid a spiral of violence in the Middle East.Global oil benchmark Brent crude dipped 0.26 per cent to USD 89.87 a barrel.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 3,268 crore on Monday, according to exchange data.The BSE benchmark tanked 845.12 points or 1.14 per cent to settle at 73,399.78 on Monday. The NSE Nifty declined 246.90 points or 1.10 per cent to finish at 22,272.50. *—PTI*

MUTUAL FUND ASSETS SOAR 35 PC IN FY24

NEW DELHI, 16 APRIL

The mutual fund assets surged by Rs 14 lakh crore or 35 per cent year-on-year to a record Rs 53.40 lakh crore in FY24, propelled by the growing participation of retail investors and buoyant equity markets.

This percentage gain was the highest since fiscal 2021 when the industry had grown by 41 per cent, the Association of Mutual Funds in India (Amfi) said in its annual report.

Women comprised about 23 per cent of investors, while men accounted for around 77 per cent.

Equity-oriented categories witnessed a growth of 55 per cent during fiscal 2024, reaching Rs 23.50 lakh crore in assets, driven by robust inflows and mark-to-market gains.

On the other hand, debt funds saw moderate growth of around 7 per cent during the fiscal to Rs 12.62 lakh crore in assets. This came after experiencing contractions in the previous two fiscal years.

Passive funds continued to benefit from institutional investment flows, particularly into exchange-traded funds (ETFs). ETFs, as a category, have assets of Rs 6.64 lakh crore as of March 2024. *—PTI*

NEW EXPORT RULES

India has allowed a limited quantity of onion exports to UAE

NEW DELHI, 16 APRIL

India has allowed a limited quantity of onion exports to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Sri Lanka, at a time when the staple vegetable's outward shipments have been kept under restrictions.

The Ministry of Commerce and Industry, through the Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT), issued a notification late Monday evening, permitting the export of an additional 10,000 metric tons (MT) of onions to the UAE (above 24,000 tonne already allowed) and 10,000 tonne to Sri Lanka, facilitated through the National Cooperative Exports Limited (NCEL).

In March, the centre allowed the export of 50,000 tonne onions to Bangladesh.

Initially, India had in early December 2023 prohibited the export of onions till March 2024. DGFT notification said the export of onions will be, however, allowed based on permission granted by the central government to other countries based on the request made by the countries.

PHOTO: PTI

Bengaluru rose onion is a variety of onion grown in and around Bengaluru, Karnataka. It got the coveted Geographical Indication tag in 2015. Faced with rising onion prices, the central government has been releasing the staple vegetable from its buffer stock. The central government had earlier decided it would maintain 3 lakh tonne of onions in the 2023-24 seasons as buffer stock. In 2022-23, the government maintained 2.51 lakh tonne onion as buffer stock.

Rabi onion harvested during April-June accounts for 65 per cent of India's onion production and meets the consumer's demand till the Kharif crop is harvested in October-November. *—ANI*

India fastest growing economy for 3 years : FM

JAIPUR, 16 APRIL

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said here on Tuesday that India has been the fastest growing economy in the last three consecutive financial years and this growth can continue in the coming years as well.

She said the next 25 years will be critical for India. In the financial year 2023-24, India witnessed a growth rate of eight per cent in three quarters and is expecting a similar level of growth in the fourth quarter, she said, adding it has been a sustainable growth.

"India has been the fastest growing economy in the last three consecutive financial years and this growth can continue in the coming years as well. The next 25 years will be very critical for India," Sitharaman said in a dialogue programme with industrialists and businessmen.

She said that foreign investors are coming to invest in India due to the credibility of its economy.

"Due to the economic policy, larger macroeconomic stability, stable government, stable taxation policy, transparent tenders and procurement, there has been immense credibility of India's economy abroad. So, the investors are coming here to invest," she said. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

- The next 25 years will be critical for India. In the financial year 2023-24, India witnessed a growth rate of eight per cent in three quarters and is expecting a similar level of growth in the fourth quarter

SERVICE SECTOR WILL CREATE JOBS, BY 2028: ORF REPORT

NEW DELHI, 16 APRIL

The report 'India Employment Outlook 2030: Navigating Sectoral Trends and Competencies' by Observer Research Foundation (ORF) forecasts a 22 per cent increase in overall employment and a decline in unemployment by 97 basis points by the year 2028.

Notably, the service sector is expected to lead this surge in job creation, with every unit rise in services output contributing to a 0.12 percent increase in employment.

It advocates prioritising investment in women's skilling, financial inclusion, and entrepreneurship to capitalise on these opportunities and foster inclusive economic growth. These include digital services, financial services, healthcare, hospitality, consumer retail, e-commerce, renewable energy, global capability centres, and MSME and start-up ecosystems. *—ANI*

India imposes port restrictions on export of essentials to Maldives

NEW DELHI, 16 APRIL

India has imposed port restrictions on the export of prohibited or restricted essential commodities that were recently allowed to be shipped to Maldives, according to a notification from the Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT).

Export of essential commodities to the island nation shall be permitted only through the following four customs stations: Mundra Sea Port, Tuticorin Sea Port, Nhava Sheva Sea Port, and ICD Tughlakabad, the DGFT said in the notification.

Notably, the approved quantities are the highest since this bilateral arrangement came into effect in 1981. India and Maldives signed a trade agreement in 1981, which provides for the export of essential commodities. The quota for river sand and stone aggregates, crucial items for the booming construction industry in Maldives, has been increased by 25 per cent to 1,000,000 metric tonnes.

There has also been an increase of 5 per cent in the quotas for eggs, potatoes, onions, sugar, rice, wheat flour and dal (pulses).

Moreover, last year, India continued to export rice, sugar and onions to the Maldives despite a worldwide ban on the export of these items from India. "India remains strongly committed to supporting human-centric development in the Maldives, as part of its 'Neighbourhood First' policy," the statement by the Indian High Commission in Maldives then stated.

Notably, ties between India and the Maldives have been strained since President Muizzu assumed office, as he criticised New Delhi during and after the presidential polls. *—ANI*

Export of essential commodities to the island nation will be allowed through four custom stations

PHOTO: PTI

Rate cuts in India off the table: Morgan

JAIPUR, 16 APRIL

As the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) maintained the status quo in the repo rate for the seventh time this month, investment bank Morgan Stanley sees rate cuts off the table. It expects no easing in policy rates in 2024-2025.

In a report titled 'India Economics: Rate Cuts Are Now Off the Table' authored by its economists Upasana Chachra and Bani Gambhir, it believes that improving productivity growth, rising investment rate, and inflation tracking above the target of 4 per cent, alongside a higher interest rate in the US, warrant higher real rates.

According to Morgan Stanley, a weaker-than-anticipated trend in domestic growth or faster-than-expected moderation in the inflation trajectory may prompt the RBI to embark on a rate-easing cycle.

For India, a higher interest rate regime with strength in the US dollar would warrant a cautious stance from RBI.

Reserve Bank of India (RBI) maintained the status quo in the repo rate for the seventh time this month

PHOTO: PTI

- For India, a higher interest rate regime with strength in the US dollar would warrant a cautious stance from RBI

Retail inflation in India is in RBI's two-six per cent comfort level but is above the ideal 4 per cent scenario. In March, it was 4.85 per cent. Inflation has been a concern for many countries, including advanced economies, but India has largely managed to steer its inflation trajectory quite well.

Barring the latest pauses, RBI raised the repo rate by 250 basis points cumulatively to 6.5 per cent since May 2022 in the fight against inflation.

Raising interest rates is a monetary policy instrument that typically helps suppress demand in the economy, thereby helping the inflation rate

Aditya Birla aims to double it's customer in 3 years

MUMBAI, 16 APRIL

Aditya Birla Capital is targeting to add 3 crore new customers in the next three years through a digital platform launched on Tuesday, a top official said.

Speaking at the launch of the Aditya Birla Capital Digital here, Aditya Birla Group chairman Kumar Mangalam Birla said the purpose of the platform is to acquire new customers in a seamless manner.

At present, Aditya Birla Capital serves over 3.5 crore customers across its businesses, including lending, insurance, and asset management.

Speaking about the catchment which can be tapped into, Birla said the wider group has a 2.5 lakh strong small business ecosystem and currently serves over 25 crore customers through products and services like telecom, fashion, and retail.

A person can choose from 22 products and services across all the offerings of Aditya Birla Capital.

He said the ambition of Aditya Birla Capital is to break into the top three in each of the core businesses.

Birla said he sees the insurance, credit, and investment businesses of ABC growing at a compounded annual growth rate of 19-21 per cent over the next 3-5 years.

He said the broader financial services sector is expected to grow at two times the annual GDP growth. *—PTI*

- The wider group has a 2.5 lakh strong small business ecosystem and currently serves over 25 crore customers through products and services like telecom, fashion, and retail

GOVT IS WORKING ON DIFFERENT RULES FOR DRONES

NEW DELHI, 16 APRIL

The civil aviation ministry will look at having a differentiated regulatory framework for drones used for civilian and industrial purposes, a senior official said on Tuesday as he pitched for indigenous development of the drone ecosystem.

Civil Aviation Secretary Vumlunmang Vualnam also emphasised that the government will make efforts to promote drones as well as push advanced air mobility.

An incentive of Rs 120 crore is being provided for Indian manufacturers of drone and drone components on the basis of value addition and certain other conditions.

The scheme seeks to provide agricultural drones to rural women and 15,000 drones will be given to women-led self-help groups. *—PTI*

ONLY WAY TO CURB BOTS

New X users may have to pay to like & post

NEW DELHI, 16 APRIL

In a bid to restrict the onrush of bots and fake accounts, new users on social media platform X (formerly known as Twitter) may now be required to pay a small annual fee to be able to like, post, bookmark, and reply. Users can still follow accounts and browse X for free, the company said.

After an upgrade on Monday, the website said new accounts are required to pay a small annual fee before they are able to post, like, bookmark, and reply.

"This is to reduce spam and to create a better experience for everyone," it said.

The new users, however, will be able to use all usual features for free after three months, Elon Musk, the owner of American technology company X Corp, which owns X, said. However, whether the new norms will be rolled out in select locations or worldwide is not clear.

"Unfortunately, a small fee for new user write access is the only way to curb the relentless onslaught of bots. Current AI (and troll farms) can pass 'are you a bot' with ease," Musk posted on X.

New unverified users now receive a dialogue box stating "unlock the ability to post and engage by paying a small fee". Premium subscribers get unlimited access to all write actions and other premium features. "The onslaught of fake accounts also uses up the available namespace, so many good handles are taken as a result," Musk further said.

The policy was initially being tested to help reduce spam and improve the experience for users, and was only active in New Zealand. The development has been garnering mixed reactions from internet users with some acknowledging the move to curtail misuse of internet and AI, while others disregarded the act as a violation of freedom of speech. *—PTI*

Elon Musk PHOTO: PTI

- New unverified users now receive a dialogue box stating "unlock the ability to post and engage by paying a small fee

Tesla lays off more than 10% of its workforce

UNITED STATES, 16 APRIL

In a memo, billionaire owner Elon Musk told staff there was nothing he hated more, "but it must be done".

The world's largest vehicle-maker by market value had 140,473 employees globally as of December, according to its latest annual report.

The electric vehicle (EV) maker has been slow to refresh its aging models as high interest rates have sapped consumer appetite for big-ticket items.

There is also the on-going pressure from China as the rise of their inexpensive EVs has begun to flood the market with affordable models.

The company is set to report its quarterly earnings later this month but has already reported a decline in vehicle deliveries in the first quarter, it's first in nearly four years and also below market expectations. Some analysts described the results as "tumultuous."

Tesla shares were down 0.8% in premarket trading on Monday. *—BBC News*

PHOTO: AFP

Candidates Chess: Gukesh draws with Nepomniachtchi

R Praggnanandhaa and Vidit Gujrathi also ended in a draw

TORONTO, APR 16

Indian Grandmaster D Gukesh held on to the joint top spot with Russian Ian Nepomniachtchi after they played out an easy draw in the 10th round of the Candidates chess tournament here.

The all-Indian duel between R Praggnanandhaa and Vidit Gujrathi also ended in a draw while Fabiano Caruana and Hikaru Nakamura defeated Firouza Alireza and Nijat Abasov respectively to come back within striking distance of the two leaders.

With just four rounds to come in the biggest event of the year, Gukesh and Nepomniachtchi have an identical six points each with Praggnanandhaa, Caruana and Nakamura close on their heels half a point behind.

Gujrathi, on six points, is sole sixth while for all practical purposes, Alireza and Abasov are out of the race with 3.5 and two points respectively. Nepomniachtchi has not been taking many risks in the event with either colour and his solid play makes him the only player who is unbeaten after 10 rounds.

The Ruy Lopez as white gave the Russian just an optical advantage after the opening and the 17-year-old Gukesh ensured parity with some timely exchanges leading to a rook and pawns endgame. The contest was almost uneventful other than the opening part and in the endgame, the players exchanged another pair of rooks and a few pawns to reach a theoretically drawn position.

Praggnanandhaa has also been very solid with just a lone loss early in the second round against Gukesh. The 18-year old faced the Berlin defense by Gujrathi who equalised easily as black. With three minor pieces and the queen off the board early, the rook and opposite colour Bishop endgame did not quite offer chances to either player. The game was drawn after 39 moves.

Caruana faced the Sicilian Najdorf by Alireza and secured the advantage out of a side variation. The players overlooked a simple tactic but Caruana still remained ahead in endgame after winning a pawn on the 29th move. Alireza fought on but the result of the game was never in doubt. The battle went on for 72 moves and in the end the Chinese split the point. Vaishali played a game of fluctuating fortunes against Salimova out of a Grunfeld defense game. The middle game saw advantage going to Salimova but Vaishali fought back while in the endgame the Indian was able to turn the tables despite blundering. This game lasted 88-moves.

—PTI

Russian Grandmaster Ian Nepomniachtchi and Indian Grandmaster D Gukesh during the match of Candidate Chess title on Tuesday

PHOTO: X/@FIDE_CHESS

PHOTO: X@GLOBEANDMAIL

Paris Olympics torch lit in ancient Olympia

ANCIENT OLYMPIA, 16 APRIL

Even without the help of Apollo, the flame that is to burn at the Paris Olympics was kindled Tuesday at the site of the ancient games in southern Greece.

Cloudy skies prevented the traditional lighting, when an actress dressed as an ancient Greek priestess uses the sun to ignite a silver torch — after offering up a symbolic prayer to Apollo, the ancient Greek sun god.

A backup flame was used that had been lit on the same spot Monday, during the final rehearsal. The first torchbearer was Greek rower Stefanos Douskos, a gold medalist in 2021 in Tokyo. He ran to a nearby monument that contains the heart of French Baron Pierre de Coubertin, the driving force behind the modern revival of the games.

The next runner was Laure Manaudou, a French swimmer who won three medals at Athens in 2004. She handed over to senior European Union official Margaritis Schinas, a Greek.

The flame will travel from Athens' port of Piraeus on the Belem, a French three-masted sailing ship built in 1896 — the year of the first modern games in Athens. But Pasquet said he'd have to watch the Paris Games from home. *—AP*

US Olympic committee strikes sponsorship deal to help athletes get degrees after they retire

NEW YORK, 16 APRIL

American Olympic athletes have a new place to turn to lock down college degrees and other skills for life after sports thanks to a partnership US Olympic leaders announced Tuesday with the Denver-based education company Guild. The deal between Guild, organizers of the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics and the US Olympic and Paralympic Committee is designed to help the Olympic organizations fulfil commitments to help athletes begin the next chapters of their lives after retirement. Guild says its online platform contains more than 250 offerings, including opportunities for undergraduate and graduate programs, certification programs and career counselling. *—AP*

Asian C'ships: Dahiya enters bronze medal round

BISHKEK, 16 APRIL

India's Rohit Dahiya made it to the bronze-medal round, making him the only Greco-Roman wrestler from the country to be in contention for a podium finish at the Asian Championships on Tuesday. On a day when all other Indian Greco-Roman grapplers continued to come up with below-par performances, Dahiya (82kg) set up a bronze-medal match-up with Uzbekistan's Mukhammadkodir Rasulov, ranked 12th in the world. In the 60kg category, Parvesh lost his pre-quarterfinal bout by technical superiority to Kazakhstan's Galym Kabdunassarov, while Hanjae Chung of South Korea overcame Vinayak Patil 7-1 on points in the 67kg category quarterfinal. *—PTI*

Zheng eases past Cîrstea in Stuttgart opener

STUTTGART, 16 APRIL

Zheng Qinwen eased past Sorana Cîrstea 6-2, 6-3 in the first round of the Porsche Grand Prix on Tuesday despite a long journey from China to reach the clay-court tournament. The seventh-ranked Zheng traveled from Changsha to Beijing and then on to Frankfurt before a final leg to Stuttgart, but showed little sign of jet lag as she wrapped up her win in 76 minutes. Zheng will play either Marta Kostyuk or former champion Laura Siegemund in the second round. Jasmine Paolini also opened with an emphatic win, beating Italian compatriot and doubles partner Sara Errani 6-1, 6-0 in just 46 minutes. Tatjana Maria faced Elise Mertens for the right to take on two-time defending champion Iga Swiatek in the second round. The Pole is bidding to become the first three-time champion in Stuttgart since Sharapova won in 2012-14. *—AP*

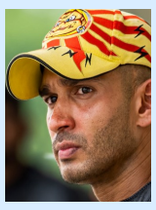
Gurgaon Open: Mani Ram dominates round one

NUH, 16 APRIL

Haryana's Mani Ram dominated round one with a scorching nine-under 63 to lead by two shots at Rs 1 crore Gurgaon Open being played at the Classic Golf & Country Club on Tuesday. Bengaluru-based C Muniyappa fired a seven-under 65 to be placed second on a windy day with the sun and clouds playing hide and seek. M Dharma, another Bengaluru golfer and Chandigarh's Rajiv Kumar Jatiwal, were a further shot back in tied third place. Mani Ram, currently 13th on the TATA Steel PGTI Ranking with a runner-up finish to his credit this season, started his birdie-run on the third hole, followed by a long conversion on the fourth and an accurate approach that led to a tap-in on the sixth. Ram, 42, a three-time winner on the PGTI Feeder Tour, then rose further on the leaderboard with three more birdies on the eighth, ninth and 10th. *—PTI*

Bengaluru's Muddappa begins season with double victory

Pune, 16 April



Multiple-time national champion Hemanth Muddappa of Mantra Racing began the season with a double victory at the summer edition of the Valley Run 2024 at Amby Valley on Tuesday. Bengaluru's Muddappa was also adjudged as the fastest rider of the day. Muddappa, the 12-time national champion, punched above his weight as he won the unrestricted class with a 1000cc bike, the BMW S1000RRR, and managed to set a national record of 09.480 seconds for this category. He edged past seasoned rider Mohammed Riyaz from Hyderabad. In the four stroke 851 to 1050cc Open class, Muddappa clocked 09.692s to take the second gold ahead of Riddhiish Patil of Mumbai but had to be content with a second place in the third category he took part. Astride a Dayatona, Riyaz won the 4-stroke 551 up to 850cc Open class in 10.421 seconds, pushing Muddappa's Kawasaki Ninja 6R to second place. *—PTI*

IPL 2024

Delhi Capitals bowler Mukesh Kumar celebrates

PHOTO: PTI

Gujarat Titans, Delhi search for consistency

AHMEDABAD, 16 APRIL

Gujrat Titans will be striving for much needed consistency when they meet Delhi Capitals in an Indian Premier League match on Wednesday.

Unlike the past two editions, the Titans have not been able to play like a well-oiled machine though they still have time to fix the flaws.

A last ball win over table leaders Rajasthan Royals on April 10 was just the kind of result the Titans needed to infuse fresh live to their campaign. They have only managed only two wins from their first six games but with another eight matches remaining, the Shubman Gill-led team has enough time to turn things around.

The absence of Mohammad Shami has hurt them but they must best use the available resources. Umesh Yadav has taken seven wickets but has leaked more than 10 runs per over. His new ball partner Spencer Johnson and the seasoned Mohit Sharma too can improve on their economy rate.

Star spinner Rashid Khan has been at his frugal best but would like to have more wickets in his kitty. His cameo in the last game helped Titans seal a thrilling win and the team would also be expecting more out of him with the bat.

Delhi Capitals, on the other hand, have struggled to assemble their playing eleven due to form and fitness issues.

Thin on Indian bating talent, the Capitals rely heavily on the likes of David Warner, who would itching to make an impact after not contributing much in the last three games.

—PTI

TODAY'S MATCH

Time: 7.30 pm

Where To Watch:

Jio Cinema, Star Sports Network

Stadium: Narendra Modi Stadium Gujarat

Every game is like semifinal for us now: RCB coach Flower

BENGALURU, 16 APRIL

After his side's sixth defeat in seven matches in the ongoing Indian Premier League, Royal Challengers Bengaluru head coach Andy Flower confessed that each of their remaining seven matches will have to be treated like a semifinal.

In the latest setback to their playoff aspirations, RCB went down by 25 runs against Sunrisers Hyderabad on Monday.

RCB conceded the highest-ever IPL total – 287 for three – as the Hyderabad batters went on a merry ride against their directionless bowlers.

The former England coach lauded Karthik for the way he took on SRH bowlers, and said it would not be surprising if the wicket-keeper batter made it to India's T20 World Cup squad.

—PTI

PHOTO: X© BCCI/ IPL

4 TITLES IN 7 MONTHS

Kolkata's 'Big 3' success will have huge impact: AIFF

PHOTO:X/ @mohunbagansg

KOLKATA, 16 APRIL

The success of Kolkata's 'Big Three' -- Mohun Bagan, East Bengal and Mohammedan Sporting -- will not just have a massive impact on state football but will also have a positive effect on the sport in the country, said All India Football Federation president Kalyan Chaubey on Tuesday.

Seven months, four titles, and the 'Mecca of Indian football' was celebrating after Mohun Bagan's maiden League Winners Shield triumph following their 2-1 win over Mumbai City FC at the packed Salt Lake Stadium here on Monday.

"Bringing home the ISL Shield, I-League Trophy, Super Cup and Durand Cup to West Bengal is a sign of new-age football in the state, and adaptability of these clubs to the newer norms of football," Chaubey told PTI. "The three giants of Kolkata enjoy enormous fan support in West Bengal, India and globally. I'm sure the success of MB and EB, along with Mohammedan Sporting joining the two in ISL next season, will have a massive impact on Indian football." It all began with Mohun Bagan starting the season with their first Durand Cup title in 23 years, defeating arch-rivals East Bengal 1-0 on September 3 last year. East Bengal made amends to win the Super Cup, beating Odisha FC 3-2 in Bhubaneswar on January 29. It marked the end of their 12-year trophy drought.

Having faced multiple relegation, Mohammedan Sporting came back from oblivion to defeat Shillong Lajong FC 2-1 earlier this month to win the I-League with a round to spare and confirm their promotion to ISL. Mohun Bagan then went on to lift the ISL Shield in front of a record 61,000-plus home crowd at the Salt Lake Stadium.

The Green and Maroon brigade will now aim to finish season by lifting the ISL Trophy, which would be a 'High Five' for the Maidan 'Big Three'. Mohun Bagan is the oldest club in India, having been established in 1889, while Mohammedan Sporting came into existence two years later in 1891. East Bengal (established in 1920) also recently celebrated their centenary year. *—PTI*